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WILLIE PEPPERS
SUPER ARTIST

THE RISE & FALL OF PACIFIC COMICS —
STEVE SCHANES
HOW HE GAMBLED — AND LOST!

#55

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S
COMICS INTERVIEW

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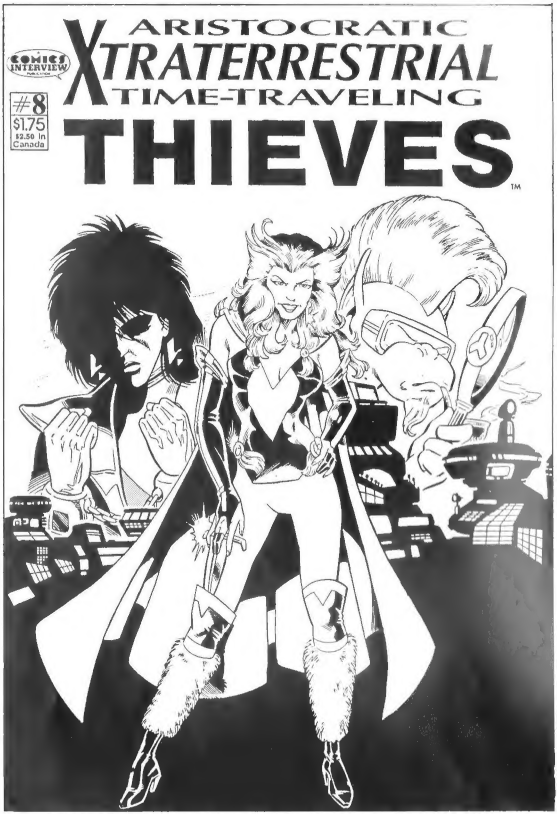

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BY HENRY VOGEL & MARK PROPST

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UP FRONT

The Southern Knights are about to reach what is, for an independent black-and-white comic, a milestone: Issue #25. This is no mean feat, in a field in which a plethora of new publishers are always announcing seemingly endless streams of new comics series, only to flounder and fail (or merge, and merge, and merge again, to the confusion of all, since no one can tell them apart any more).

Amidst this market turmoil, there are precious few landmarks that comics fans can count on, year in and year out. SOUTHERN KNIGHTS is one.

Even more unusual is the fact that it is a "superhero" book. For some reason, while superheroes thrive in color comics, there are no real contenders in black-and-white but the KNIGHTS. Why has the series taken root where so many others have failed? Maybe it's because of the unpretentious approach taken by writer **Henry Vogel**, whose work is always light, refreshing, and fun to read. There is none of the dark angst and ugliness that, like the shadow of Mordor, has crept over the mainstream comics landscape. As characters, the Southern Knights are the sort of people you'd like to know, the sort you'd be proud to call friends.

The out-of-print early issues are available again in an inexpensive series of graphic album collections; elsewhere in this issue of INTERVIEW you'll also find a "Last Chance" to subscribe to the SOUTHERN KNIGHTS at our old rates (which will be going up this spring).

If you have yet to give the KNIGHTS a try, now's the time.

And, if you want to know what I think, the SOUTHERN KNIGHTS has yet to hit its stride as a series. The best, I believe, still lies ahead.

–Dave

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"It doesn't seem like anybody's having

HENRY VOGEL

When I was offered the chance to interview Henry Vogel, I jumped at it. In fact, I fairly pole-vaulted at it. I've been a fan of Henry's SOUTHERN KNIGHTS for almost five years, and find his X-THIEVES a delight. What first captured me was the wit and freshness of his work. Henry's books are an oasis of humor and fun in the midst of the pessimism that has seized comics. Unlike so many, he does not take himself too seriously and he seems to have a marvelous time. Simultaneously, he makes very sharp and funny attacks on whatever authority figure offends him, from the I.R.S. to the forces of censorship. Yet he never preaches and he never bores.

A honey-colored beard and mustache hide the lower half of his face, but the eyes reigning over all that hair are blue and sharp. He has done interviews before; his delivery was smooth and sure, but those eyes flicked constantly. I got the impression he is still not altogether comfortable with the idea of being interviewed.

Audrey Vogel is tall and as slender and graceful as the two cats that glided around the apartment. She is an intelligent and perceptive woman, who, I suspect, finds quietly galling the public's usual treatment of a writer's wife: she is often either condescended to or ignored. Yet Audrey is often a source of ideas, a sounding board, even a kind of second editor for Henry. When Henry and I began the interview, she sat down in a chair against the wall, but eventually ended up on the couch with us, participating fully.

When I myself first sat down at that couch, I looked up to see five framed John Buscema prints on the wall: Conan engaged in various acts of mayhem. Elsewhere around the large den were a couple of SOUTHERN KNIGHTS covers, likewise proudly displayed. A dog-eared copy of COMICS INTERVIEW lay on an end table. The two cats, Persians, ghosted around or on top of everything and everyone, paying particular attention to my tape recorder. They, like their owners, were very friendly and I was soon at ease...

All art copyright © 1988 The Guild unless otherwise noted

fun. Too much angst out there, people."

JULIE WOODCOCK: *What anniversary for SOUTHERN KNIGHTS is this we're celebrating?*

HENRY VOGEL: Sixth actually. We've been going for more than five years now, so March will be the sixth anniversary of when **David Willis** and I officially formed The Guild and actually got an artist and things like that, and in August we'll have the anniversary of the first issue. It's closing in on six years. It's been more than six years, actually, since the group was in the planning stages.

JULIE: *How did David Anthony Kraft's advent as publisher with issue #8 change or affect SOUTHERN KNIGHTS?*

HENRY: We're still here! *(Laughter.)* Simply put. I think that's one of the major differences right there. He showed up when the publishing side of doing KNIGHTS was beginning to overwhelm **David Willis** and myself, and that way we were able to shove all of that stuff over to him — "Yeah, you do the real work, we'll do the fun stuff!" That's helped a whole lot right there. As far as from my personal point of view, ever since DAK took over publishing the book I've had either him or **Dwight Zimmerman** editing the book, so I've been able to get input on my writing from people who have made or are making their living in the comic-book industry. I think that's *really* helped my writing.

JULIE: *How do you think your writing has changed?*

HENRY: It's gotten *better! (Laughter.)* You want something more specific than that?

JULIE: *Yeah.*

HENRY: Well, it's gotten more concise. I've gotten a better handle on the characters as time has gone by, have less difficulty shifting into the various personalities of the Knights. And I've become a good bit better at looking at my own writing and asking myself if this is actually doing something, and sometimes I can look at it and say, "No, that's useless, I won't bother sending it to the editor, I'll just sit down and rewrite it." However, as Dwight knows, most of the time he'll look at what I send him and say, "Boy, that's useless" — and he sends it back to me and I rewrite it, and things get a lot better then. But I just think overall my confidence in my writing has grown, and my writing ability has grown quite a bit

Photo: Courtesy Alan Davonsey

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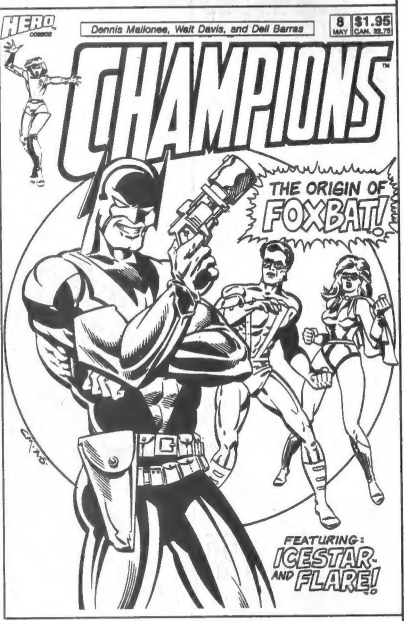

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"That's what we get for working in the comic-book industry."

Southern Knights
DATA FILES
Name: Kristin Austin.
Age: 22.
Alias: None.
Height: 5'2".
A mutant endowed with incredible strength, the extent of which is not yet known, and seemingly impervious skin. She is known to have lifted Dragon, a fellow Southern Knight, who weighs several tons.

. . . it's hard to pinpoint, you know. I was there at each level and I know if I go back and read some of those early issues I will shudder and go, *"Gee,* I sure do wish I could go back and rewrite some of those books!" *(Laughter.)*

JULIE: *Yeah, I know that feeling. How do you think the characters have changed? Have they changed much?*

HENRY: Well, they've changed some. Connie has grown more confident in herself, and has been adjusting to the idea of having people actually care *for* her, which is something really rather new in her life. Kristin really hasn't changed too much except that she has a definite direction in her life, which she didn't really have to begin with. Personality-wise there have been some changes, just nothing major. There have been *events,* things that have happened *to* them, like the overall ramifications of Serpent's arrival on the scene, for instance, to Dragon. We've a long way to go on that, we're just beginning.

JULIE: *What are your sort of base concepts for that relationship?*

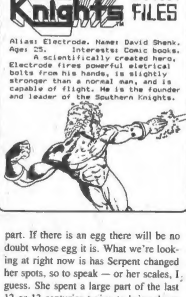
HENRY: Well . . . we're trying to decide whether they are going to try to have a family.

JULIE: *Lots of little dragons.*

HENRY: That's right. You can sort of picture it, Serpent lays an egg *(Laughter.)* We were *toying* with having the third dragon, which showed up at the end of DRAGON #1, come in, so Serpent would be wondering whose egg it was —

JULIE: *DRAGONS OF OUR LIVES.* (Laughter.)

HENRY: Yes, we're going to skip that part. If there is an egg there will be no doubt whose egg it is. What we're looking at right now is has Serpent changed her spots, so to speak — or her scales, I guess. She spent a large part of the last 12 or 13 centuries trying to bring down mankind and take her revenge for the killing of the dragons. Is she going to be able to just *blithely* toss all of that away and link up with somebody from the other side who has been working *with* humans all of that time, trying to keep them alive, and if so exactly how this will affect both of them and their perceptions of what's been going on and their perceptions, really, of themselves. You know, Dragon *thinks* he likes humans and Serpent *thinks* she hates humans, but is that really the way they feel?


Southern Knights
DATA FILES
Alias: Electrode. Name: David Shenk.
Age: 25. Interests: Comic books.
A scientifically created hero, Electrode fires powerful electrical bolts from his hands, is slightly stronger than a normal man, and is capable of flight. He is the founder and leader of the Southern Knights.

Southern Knights
DATA FILES
Name: Connie Ronnin.
Age: 24.
Alias: None.
Origin: Mutant.
Notes: Olympic caliber fencer.
Manifesting as a sword, her power causes those "hit" by her sword to feel as if a real sword was being wielded. The effects are temporary and seemingly fatal hits merely cause loss of consciousness.

Southern Knights
DATA FILES
Alias: Dragon. Human Alias: Mark Dagon. Dragon Name: Unknown.
Age: 2000+. Profession: Writer.
He is the last of the dragons, highly intelligent, strong, capable of flight and breathing fire. Although mankind destroyed his race, he holds no grudge against humanity.

artist —

HENRY: Yes, **Willie Peppers.** Willie, we love you.

JULIE: *So a good artist is —*

HENRY: Real nice to have.

JULIE: *You see the process of writing a comic book as being teamwork, or is that the case?*

HENRY: Yeah, it's gotta be. It's not a comic book without an artist, and it's hard to read without words — although you can *look* at it, like with CEREBUS where you look at it and look at it and every now and then a word pops up. I like CEREBUS, let me say that so nobody thinks I'm detracting from CEREBUS — hi, Dave. *(Laughter.)* But yeah, it's definitely a team project. Art is what draws every reader in, there's no two ways about it. When you're in a comic-book store you don't have time to sit down and determine

Southern Knights
DATA FILES
Name: Araeis Merrow.
Age: 16.
In magical stasis from 1725 to 1984, he is truly a man out of time. He is a powerful sorcerer of limited experience, having begun his training only a few years before being put in stasis by his parents.

"We're going to deal with Bianca's college

whether the person writing the book is a good writer — unless you like to sit in comic-book stores and read comic books, which the owners of comic-book stores don't like. So art on a first sale basis is *far* more important than the writing. And I think consistent artwork is very important, as is consistent writing, for keeping people around. Well, you can't have one without the other really.

JULIE: *Of the artists that you've worked with, has there been a particular favorite?*

HENRY: Mark Propst, of course. I've worked with Mark more than any other artist. On X-THIEVES Mark and I have reached the point where I can call him up and give him a plot over the phone and save time without having to type it up and send it to him, and it's really nice because we're thinking on the same wavelength. That's very important. That's one of the reasons I'm glad to be working with Willie, because I've worked with Willie and we're thinking along the same lines as far as the book is concerned. And I had a good working relationship with **Chuck Wojtkiewicz** — we did seven issues, and he just did issue #26, his return issue.

JULIE: *To talk about something different, the black-and-white market has been doing kind of the same thing the stock market is doing, taking a nose dive —*

HENRY: We beat the stock market to it — we're the trendsetters. *(Laughter.)*

JULIE: *What do you think caused that? Do you have any ideas?*

HENRY: Oh yeah. Of course, everybody has an opinion on this, mine is *right. (Laughter.)* What happened, it's all an offshoot of TURTLES becoming wildly successful, and the sharp escalation of prices on the early issues of TURTLES, and then FISH POLICE came along — so it's the fault of **Eastman, Laird,** and **Moncuse.** They put out these books that everyone wanted to buy, and the prices went spiraling upwards — they were mainly just the most noticeable books out there. The dealers saw a way to make some big bucks with them and then they became sort of afraid of missing out on the next TURTLES or the next FISH POLICE, so they started ordering things that were black-and-whites with limited print runs, realizing that if even 15% of the potential audience wanted it there would be a massive demand for that book.

JULIE: *You did an issue of X-THIEVES that dealt with this kind of thing, was that meant as your comment?*

HENRY: Yeah, I think people just went overboard looking towards getting the new hot black-and-white, and people weren't careful with what they published and people weren't careful with what they bought, and in the long run we ended up with a lot of stuff out there that should have never been published or bought; and now they've turned it around and they are going completely in the opposite direction. It used to be if it was black-and-white they'd buy it, and now it's almost reached the point of if it's black-and-white they don't want to buy it. It was an overreaction on both ends, I think. It's human nature, it's the way the world works, and it's just a pity it had to happen in *my* market. But that's the way the market works. That's capitalism and free enterprise, and all of us who don't believe in government intervention — or government at all, for that matter — think that that's life; that's what we get for working in the comic-book industry.

JULIE: *There's been a lot of conversation on the censorship issue, do you have anything you want to say about that?*

HENRY: Well, censorship has at least at this point died off. I did get a letter from a fan commenting on X-THIEVES #6, saying that censorship in general was . . . she considered it beating a dead horse. I said, "unfortunately, it's a dead horse you have to beat every now and then to make sure it stays dead," and we've just finished

Serpent — pencils by Willie Peppers for SOUTHERN KNIGHTS #25.

days, when she was in the thief college."

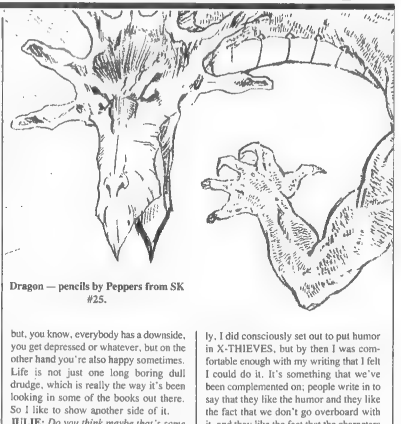
beating it again so maybe it'll stay dead for awhile. As a writer I'm totally completely 600% against censorship, or anything that would stop me from saying what I want to, in the way of outside restrictions. *I* change my mind about what I want to say, *I* decide what I want to say, *I* say what I want to say; and within the company DAK can decide whether he wants to publish something or not, or he can question whether I'm really saying something the way I want, and that's not censorship, that's editing. What I was really afraid of, for awhile there, was something from the outside would come along, some people would set up a comic book review board to levy ratings, establish some external control over what we say, which would be censorship; but we didn't get that.

JULIE: *Does it seem to you that there is a trend towards a certain darkness, a kind of a pessimism, in comic-book writing?*

HENRY: Yeah, sure. I said this in my first interview and I'll say it again: I remember when the X-Men used to have fun! They laughed every now and then, told a few jokes, played a game of softball in the back yard or something. Now, gee, everything is an international or interstellar crisis — it doesn't seem like anybody's having fun. Too much angst out there, people. Angst is nice but let's be human. All these people would have killed themselves by now.

JULIE: *Maybe beyond even the angst, it seems that there is a sort of increasing violence, too. Do you see that?*

HENRY: I don't know, I guess maybe the violence from the movies has made it to the comic books. That's not to say that comic books were not violent to begin with . I guess it depends on what you're looking at; for instance the violence in DARK KNIGHT and WATCHMEN was extremely well handled, and there were reasons behind it and things like that, and they were pessimistic books but *excellently* done. But the thing is . . . I don't know, there just seems to be too much of it. To have the angst, the downside, the pessimistic side, make an impact, then you've got to have the bright outlook, too. It's like in a lot of books the angst and the pessimism is all that there is, there's never anything else, there's not a bright side — the bright side is they're alive at the end of the book. I don't like that myself because people aren't that way, most people aren't. I don't know any psychopaths like that — I don't know any psychopaths at all, at least I don't *know* that I do — but, you know, everybody has a downside, you get depressed or whatever, but on the other hand you're also happy sometimes. Life is not just one long boring dull drudge, which is really the way it's been looking in some of the books out there. So I like to show another side of it.



Dragon — pencils by Peppers from SK #25.

JULIE: *Do you think maybe that's some of the reason for the popularity of X-THIEVES and SOUTHERN KNIGHTS, because those books tend to have a brighter outlook?*

HENRY: I think so. A lot of people write in and they say that they like the humor in there. You know, it was nothing that I consciously set out to do. Well, actually, I did consciously set out to put humor in X-THIEVES, but by then I was comfortable enough with my writing that I felt I could do it. It's something that we've been complemented on; people write in to say that they like the humor and they like the fact that we don't go overboard with it, and they like the fact that the characters remain human and they also seem to have fun. Not *all* of the time, but they have fun, they crack jokes, things like that.

JULIE: *The repartee is nice.*

HENRY: Thank you. One thing we hear a lot is that people really like it that the SOUTHERN KNIGHTS characters talk like *real* people. I was afraid after I read the first few letters like that that I was going to be self-conscious about it and would start thinking while I was scripting, "Is this the way a real person would speak?" — and then they would start speaking unlike real people because I would be consciously trying to make them do it, forcing it. But fortunately it never came to that. And people will usually say which characters they really like, which is their second favorite character. In KNIGHTS everybody likes Dragon, and then some people like Kristin, some people like Electrode, some people like Connie, and some people like all of them. I like all of them.

JULIE: *What are you doing to poor Aramis? I get the distinct impression that the poor boy is cracking up.*

HENRY: Well, gee, I wouldn't want to comment on that except that those issues will probably be out by the time this is printed, so . . . Well, we're trying to deal with his adjusting to the 20th century —

"Teak is the only practicing homosexual arti-

Bryan the caretaker at work — and play.

TAKE THAT, EVIL STUMP MASTER! NO LONGER WILL YOU TERRORIZE THIS BACYARD!
HEH-HEH-- WHAT A TRIP!
HMM-- WHAT ELSE CAN I USE THIS SUIT FOR? MAYBE IF I CANGET THE BLASTERS TO WORK I CAN TRIM THE HEDGES WITH THEM!

that's *really* the major thing we're doing. We're certainly trying to give the impression that he's cracking up, and whether he *is* cracking up or not is something you'll have to wait and find out.

JULIE: *I believe that you are going to be doing a Kristin mini-series?*

HENRY: Connie.

JULIE: *Oh.*

HENRY: And we don't know if that's going to be done as a mini-series or fit in as perhaps a three-issue run in the book, it just depends on how it'll work better.

JULIE: *Can you tell me what the idea is there?*

HENRY: The idea was based on a song by **Blue Oyster Cult** called "Veteran of the Psychic Wars." I sort of got to thinking about what it would be like if there was an entire subculture of psychic humanity out there, and they've been warring for years or decades or centuries or whatever, fighting these psychic battles with nobody knowing what's going on, nobody except for themselves knowing anything about it at all. And given that it was psychic, Connie having the psychic sword we thought was the obvious method for the Knights to get drawn into the conflict. We'll have her drawn into the conflict for a very specific reason — probably not *into* the conflict, but she'll have a profound affect on it — and then return to the Knights. Also along the way we'll be doing an origin for Dread.

JULIE: *I will be coming out with my own book, God willing, in the summer. Do you have any advice for me?*

HENRY: Sell lots of books. *(Laughter.)*

JULIE: *That is my objective, but how do you go about doing that?*

HENRY: You can't plan what the market's going to do. You can sit down and do the best job you can on the book, and advertise it well, and if it just happens to hit the right nerve or hit at the right time then you're in great shape. X-THIEVES is a perfect example. We didn't plan to do the book. **Dave Kraft** and Mark and I got together at Dave's place to talk about SOUTHERN KNIGHTS, and just out of the blue we came up with X-THIEVES and decided to do the book, and we happened to put it out at the right time and it sold quite well. The sales were wonderful, I want to get those sales back. *(Laughter.)* If I knew a way to plan it and to make those sales work, you can bet that I wouldn't tell anybody about it.

JULIE: *Well, regardless of sales, which is kind of in the lap of the gods, what kind of creative advice would you have?*

HENRY: I don't know what to say.

AUDREY VOGEL: Stick with your own

ficial intelligence in the comic-book industry."

CONCENTRATING, DAVID SHENK DRAWS UPON AN INNER POWER--
--A POWER UNIQUELY HIS, PUBLICATED AND ONE ELSE IN THE WORLD--
--A POWER THAT ALLOWS HIM TO BECOME THE CRIME-FIGHTER CALLED ELECTRODE!
I GUESS BRYAN PROPPED THE DOOR OPEN WHEN THE CALL CAME...
... HE MUST HAVE GOTTEN TIRED OF REPLACING DOORS AFTER I FLEW THROUGH THEM!

concepts.

HENRY: There you go.

AUDREY: A lot of times other people will come up with ideas for your characters or your plots, and they won't always work if you try to follow those ideas.

HENRY: An excellent point. You're the one, as the creator of your concept, who originally came up with it, you know it much better than they do. They've only seen what you've been able to put on paper, so there's a lot that they're not going to know. Even after around 25 issues of SOUTHERN KNIGHTS there's a lot that people don't know about the Knights, or misconceptions that they have. So that's something that's very important, to stick with your concepts. If they give you something that seems wrong, explain the problem and listen if they argue, but stick to your guns.

JULIE: *Do you and Audrey work together a lot on the ideas?*

HENRY: Not really. We did to begin with, but I just had more time to work on it. And quite frankly I was the one more interested in writing the comic books and getting them out there. I still talk to Audrey, I bounce ideas off of her and things like that. I sort of consider Audrey as a second line editor. If something comes back from Dwight and he wants something changed and I feel that he's going in the wrong direction, then I ask Audrey's opinion. If Audrey *definitely* agrees with me then I'll leave it in the direction I was going, otherwise I go in the direction Dwight was heading. So she's sort of a second line editor, but only on things where I feel that Dwight might not see what I was looking at or whatever, and even then if Audrey agrees more with Dwight than she does with me I change it anyway. And, you know, I bounce plot ideas off of her, she makes suggestions every now and then, really good ones. For those people who read the SOUTHERN KNIGHTS/X-THIEVES crossover in the second X-THIEVES #1, she was the one who came up with the reason for New Coke coming out — the Coke formula had been stolen and they had to bring out New Coke — which really tied the entire issue together and made it work

GREAT!
DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW HARD IT IS TO REPLACE A CLEMSON SHIRT HERE IN GEORGIA?
AND YOU CALLED ME TOOTS, FOR GOD'S SAKE!
NO ONE CALLS ME TOOTS--
--AND GETS AWAY WITH IT!

PETER KUPER'S

New York

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NEW YORK

Peter Kuper's New York, New York. 84 pages, black-and-white and color. Available at fine comics specialty stores, or directly from the publisher for $9.95 + $2.00 postage and handling: Fantagraphics Books, 1800 Bridgegate Street, Suite 101, Westlake Village, CA 91361.

[illegible] Peter Kuper's book is first for consistently turning [illegible] and put it to the purpose of its most glory.

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now I'm in love

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art director, *New York Times*

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—Howard Cruse

"Peter Kuper's work is what they usually mean when they refer to art in the organic story 'medium' [illegible] comics. [illegible]

—Walter Simonson

"That's right, I do read a book from Marvel."

JULIE: *What particular comics do you like personally?*

HENRY: Some of the ones that I'm reading right now that I like a lot are ZOT — I think ZOT is fantastic, *everybody* should buy copies of ZOT right after they buy copies of SOUTHERN KNIGHTS and X-THIEVES. ZOT's a heck of a lot of fun, and I don't mind that it's in black-and-white — it was originally in color. CONCRETE is a new black-and-white book that is something very much different from most of what is being published today, and I think anybody would like it.

JULIE: *Why do you think CONCRETE is particularly good?*

HENRY: Because it is! *(Laughter.)* It's well written, it's well drawn, it's got a sense of humor, it's something *different*. You could sort of kind of maybe slide it in sideways, through the crack, and call it a superhero comic book, but it's really not. It just happens to involve somebody who's very very strong, practically invulnerable — that's as close as it comes to being a superhero book. But it's unique, it does things differently.

Let's see: what else do I read? I read lots of stuff. GROO is fun. That's right, I do read a book from Marvel. And I like the new WONDER WOMAN. That's really good, I think **George Perez** has done a wonderful job with that. CEREBUS I like, although I do wish there would be a little bit more going on in each issue. I've been reading NEXUS and BADGER since the beginning. GRIMJACK, I like GRIMJACK. We've just recently been able to get copies of OMAHA THE CAT DANCER from Kitchen Sink, and while I don't recommend it for the kiddies in the family I really like that one, it's a well done book. That's an example of a book that's trying to break the mold that comic books have. It's hard to categorize.

AUDREY: It's not hard porn.

HENRY: There we go. It's erotic and the stories are good. It's just about the lives of the characters.

SOUTHERN KNIGHTS

BACK ISSUES

There are many more than 500 comic books being published today! Out of all those, the latest OVERSTREET PRICE GUIDE UPDATE — one of the most unbiased sources of true scarcity and value in the comics-collecting hobby — lists very few as being genuinely hot. Of those, even fewer have every issue of the title listed as hot. There are 22 titles, to be exact, that have the complete run listed as hot. 22 out of over 500. And the SOUTHERN KNIGHTS is one of those 22.

Crusaders #1: (August 1982) 4350 copies printed. This was our very first issue (the title changed with #2) and it is very hard to find! So my _____ is my about it that I have decided to s SOLD OUT own personal collection for sale, and _____ pair. These three copies will be available on a first come, first served basis for $35 each. Only one to a customer.

Southern Knights #2: (January 1983) 6022 printed. We have a limited number of these available by the following arrangement:
The #1, #2 set for $7.50 per copy
The next 25 will be $10 per copy.
The final 25 will be $15 per copy.

Southern Knights #3 and #4: (August & November 1983) 7096 & 6430 printed. Again, we have a limited number of each of these issues available. They're for sale for $5 per copy while our stocks last.

Southern Knights _____ printed. Next to our first issue, this is a SOLD OUT t than 50 of these left! What we have _____ (20 left).

Southern Knights #6 and #7: (July & September 1984) 5500 each printed. These were the last two issues published by the Guild. What few copies we have are for sale at $4 per copy until we run out. The above comic books are available directly from:

HENRY VOGEL
P.O. Box 6396
Greenville, SC 29606

Please make all checks payable to HENRY VOGEL. Prices above are postpaid. All will be autographed at your request.

Southern Knights #8 through present: These books are all available directly from Comics Interview Publications at a cost of $3.00 each, postpaid — any two for $5 postpaid — with the exception of SOUTHERN KNIGHTS #8 which counts as two issues (8)! IMPORTANT NOTE: Issues #10, #12, #14, #16 and #17 are SOLD OUT! Send your order to:

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— Henry Vogel

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"There is no insurance against the I.R.S. agent."

JULIE: *What things don't you like?*

HENRY: Ninjas, I'm tired of 'em, go away. We had somebody — I was tired of ninjas five years ago — somebody wrote us when we were just getting started with the Knights and wanted to see Connie get more into the Eastern mysticism and stuff like that, and see more of that stuff. My own thought was, "God, no!" *(Laughter.)* We do not need that for Connie. There's more than enough people doing that. It's all **Frank Miller's** fault because he did it so well, but most other people haven't. So I'm just tired of 'em. Next question.

JULIE: *What exactly is Missing Beings?*

HENRY: Didn't you read all of SOUTHERN KNIGHTS *#7, #8,* and *#9*? Shame, shame, shame. *(Laughter.)* Missing Beings originally appeared as a backup series in SOUTHERN KNIGHTS, and I've wanted to do it in its own book ever since then, and we just never quite managed to have everything work out so that we could do that; *but* I think we're finally going to manage to get the book out all on its own. Missing Beings officially is Missing Beings, Inc. This is far in the future when mankind has spread to the stars and met many an alien race, so you can no longer say "missing person," you have to say "missing being." And Missing Beings, basically, is a company that for a fee will find someone who's missing. Since the distances that you can go to be missing have increased greatly, there is no way a normal police force can deal with or find someone who's missing or who's been kidnapped, especially if they've been taken off the planet, and sometimes even if they aren't, because society has just grown so complicated because there are so many people. So Missing Beings came into existence, and for a rather steep fee they will look for and find, usually, the being that is missing.

The story is set around three characters: Tristan Furreel, who is the head of the branch that we deal with — they branch out into frontier worlds; his assistant Tracy Arden, who actually happens to be Bianca's sister; and their computer, Teak. Teak is as far as I know the only practicing homosexual artificial intelligence in the comic-book industry. *(Laughter.)* Tristan Furreel originally started out on earth and was transferred to this new, very small, far-flung branch of Missing Beings out on the planet Thyra, and when he arrived they had the minimum required setup, which was Teak, and her sexual proclivities became quickly apparent when for no particular reason he made a pass at her. And

David Shem — alias Electrode — Atlanta's first and foremost protector, Connie Ronnin — wielder of the psychic sword Dragon — one of the last of his race, able to assume the human guise of Mark Dagon. Kristie Austin — petite but endowed with incredible strength. Together, they are the Southern Knights!
Part I
of Deities & Dragons
STORY HENRY VOGEL, MARK PROFIT, JIM SANDERS III PENCILS T.R. BAMFORTH LETTERS DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT EDITOR
LONG AGO, THERE WERE MANY, MANY GODS ON EARTH. YOU CAN'T GO ANYWHERE WITHOUT TRIPPING OVER SHRINES TO THIS GOD OR THAT GOD -- SOMETIMES YOU EVEN STUMBLED OVER THE GODS THEMSELVES! BUT THEN, WITH TYPICAL HUMAN LOYALTY, MAN ABANDONED THE OLD GODS TO EMBRACE A NEW ONE, WITHOUT MAN'S WORSHIP TO SUSTAIN THEM, THE OLD GODS QUIETLY FADED FROM POWER TO EXIST IN THE GREAT VOID FOREVER...
HOLY GHOST MEMORIAL RETIREMENT HOME FOR UNWORSHIPED DEITIES
... BUT THE NEW GOD, COMPASSION ON THEM. WITHIN THE VOID, HE CREATED A PLACE FOR THEM AND THEY FLOCKED TO IT -- FOR IT WAS SOMEWHERE THEY WERE BETTER THAN NOWHERE! TO BE SURE, THEIR COMFORTS AS THEY WERE AWAY THE GODS, THE HOME IS STAFFED WITH ANGELS WHOSE ONLY DUTY IS TO SEE TO THE OLD GODS' COMFORT. THIS PLACE HAS MANY NAMES. THE OLD GODS CALL IT "HOME," THE STAFF CALLS IT "THAT HELL HOLE" AND THE THEOLOGS CALL IT -- PURGATORY.
OBVEROUS SOUL, WHERE ARE YOU?

This page and next: The final fate of the gods, from SK #15.

not too long after he showed up, Tracy the assistant showed up, and both Teak and Tristan wanted to, shall we say, get Tracy. Unfortunately for Teak, Tracy was not one who believes in man/machine relationships, so Teak has sort of been left out in the cold as far as that goes. And nothing has developed so far between Tracy and Tristan.

JULIE: *Teak, she's the computer?*

HENRY: Yes, Teak's the computer. She has a look —

JULIE: *She's an artificial intelligence.*

HENRY: Yes. She has a look. She has a screen, and she's really quite attractive; and she has, shall we say, her own room and her set of *toys*, implements, devices — she's very inventive.

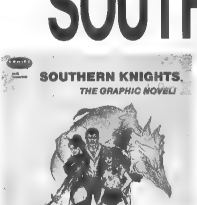
JULIE: *Well, the logistics of a computer with homosexual tendencies just boggles my mind. Admittedly I may be somewhat backward, but —*

HENRY: Well, I figure it's really no different than a computer with heterosexual tendencies.

JULIE: *Well, that's true, any kind of machine with sexual tendencies would be strange.*

HENRY: So anyway, in the backup to SOUTHERN KNIGHTS — which I

SOUTHERN KNIGHTS!



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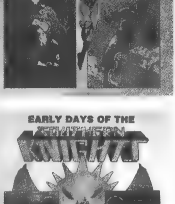

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A COMICS INTERVIEW PUBLICATION

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"He came up with about 13,000 ways to tax nothing."

believe we will reprint — they went on their first actual adventure together and succeeded, of course, in retrieving the missing being. So now they're ready for other exciting adventures. I've got several ideas for stories. This is done kind of tongue in cheek, at least parts of it. Probably the first of the new stories will involve Tracy and Tristan having to transport themselves into the computer world that Teak lives in, which we saw in the second of the three original installments. There's an actual world in there, and all of the various pieces of equipment, the software, the programs, run around in there, and they range in intelligence. Not everything is really intelligent, and you have your stupid guard programs and things like that.

JULIE: *Sort of a TRON kind of thing?*

HENRY: Well, in concept, not in execution. But you may be wondering how a being is going to go missing in the computer world, and it's actually a being, a person, that gets missing. He discovers a way to transfer his consciousness into the computer world, and gets kidnapped by a software gang.

JULIE: *I can tell you work in a software store*

HENRY: Oh, I came up with that long before — I've been into computers for quite awhile. So the Missing Beings people go in after him. If you ever wondered where your software went when you weren't using it, there's a country club in there that we're going to go to.

JULIE: *Maybe I shouldn't go into it, but I was thinking that the advantage of having sexual relations with a machine is you don't have to worry about AIDS.*

HENRY: They might have gotten rid of that by the time of the stories.

JULIE: *What kind of things are you going to be doing in X-THIEVES in upcoming issues?*

HENRY: Oh, boy, we have all sorts of big exciting things going on in X-THIEVES, yes indeed — and we're not going to tell you a single one of them. *(Laughter.)*

JULIE: *Aw, please.*

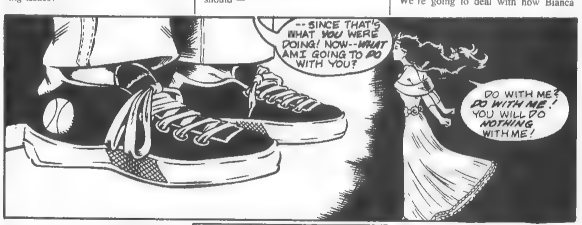
HENRY: Okay, okay, okay. There is going to be a change in Fred and Bianca's personal life, a major change. Big changes — gee, I don't know how much of this I should —

JULIE: *In their personal relationship?*

HENRY: Yes, in how they actually deal with one another. Should we give it away?

AUDREY: No.

HENRY: We're not going to give it away. But we're going to delve into their pasts, do a set of microseries about each of their pasts. We're going to delve into why Fred, someone from an aristocratic family from an entire aristocratic race, became a thief. We're going to deal with how Bianca



"Regardless of how you obtain your money, whether you steal

became a thief. Actually we're going to deal with Bianca's college days, when she was in thief college.

JULIE: *Thief U., right!*

HENRY: That's right. *(Laughter.)* We'll see where Bianca first met Cat, a character who will show up in X-THIEVES #8, and where she first met Pix, a character who was in X-THIEVES #6, and her first encounter with the cop we refer to as the Rambocop, the four-armed cop with very little brains, who happened to be going to the rival cop college. They'd sort of get together for field days, you see, and the cops would be cops and the thieves would be thieves, and they'd see whether the cops could be cops and the thieves could be thieves, so it was a very intense rivalry there. *(Laughter.)* And from there we'll move into how Fred and Bianca first met, and — as Mark stated *years* ago — Fred stole her. And then we will deal with how they became entangled, as Fred tries to woo her and win her heart. And then there's supposed to be a fourth microseries featuring — gasp! — the Fredmobile.

JULIE: *Bianca's ex-lover, Hunk, we last saw him about to be eaten by something. What happened to him? Are we going to see more of him or is he dead?*

HENRY: No, he's not dead — nobody dies in comics. *(Laughter.)* He's not dead. He's probably been a tad roughed up, shall we say, but he's not dead. We couldn't have a thoroughly obnoxious character like him be dead. *All* of the villains that we've had in X-THIEVES, like the I.R.S. guy, keep reappearing. Well, we've had one or two nonrecurring characters, but we like to bring them back

AUDREY: There's this running thing where Mark draws in these animals in his panels, and the first couple of times he did this Henry made the animals say something. So they became characters in the book, so Mark started writing in the margins, "Don't let this lizard say anything!" *(Laughter.)*

HENRY: Yeah, there's a rat that rides around on the repo guy's ship, and he keeps saying, "I've gotta get off of this dump. Next time we set down, I've gotta get off this piece of crap." But he hasn't gotten off yet, and he's been around for awhile.

JULIE: *Well, you could write a story around him. I can't say why the Hunk character . . . I mean he was thoroughly reprehensible but I liked him in a sick kind of a way, I don't know what it was. I guess there was such a potential there, with all of that jealousy and rivalry and all of those macho kind of things. There's something about a display of macho from someone who's about three feet high with a long white tail, for some reason I enjoyed that.*

HENRY: Are you saying that Fred was macho?

JULIE: *I consider Fred to be entirely macho, but something about seeing him* behave *in a macho fashion was really funny.*

HENRY: Well, that was the idea. We set Hunk up as somebody that was unbeatable — he laid waste to those four guys at the beginning of the book — and really without Fred's Fredmobile booster strength he would have never been able to beat Hunk.

JULIE: *Physically.*

HENRY: Physically, yes. He's much smarter than Hunk, and much quicker than Hunk. So it was a good way to show how much Fred and Bianca care for each other, and bring in the past and have some fun, and make a statement — gosh, I'm going to sound so liberated — but make a statement on how women should be treated, all at the same time. *Women* are people, too, by God! *(Laughter.)*

JULIE: *One thing I've noticed is you seemed to do a whole turnaround with like the I.R.S. or cops or whoever being the bad guys; why do you do that?*

First meeting of the Southern Knights and the X-Thieves, from the now out-of-print ARISTOCRATIC X-TRATERRESTRIAL TIME-TRAVELING THIEVES #1.

THUD
WHAT WAS THAT?!
BLAM!
BLINDS LIKE SOMETHING HEAVY CRASHED IN THE FRONT WINDOW
IT COULD BE SOMEONE OR SOMETHING ATTACKING US! YOU THERE! STAY HERE WHILE I--
SEVERAL MINUTES LATER...
SEE, I TOLD YOU IT'D GET US DOWN SAFE AND SOUND!
NO WAY, ELECTRODE! IF IT'S AN ATTACK, IT'LL BE SAFER IF THEY DO US CHECK IT OUT!
IF MY IDEA OF SAFE WERE THE SAME AS YOURS, I'D BE AWEGANNY RIGHT NOW!
YEE, WELL... DON'T BOTHER TAKING US TO YOUR LEADER.
THAT'S TELLING HIM!
HEY, GANG -- LOOK! LIVE EXTRA-TERRESTRIALS! AND THEY COME IN PEACE!
WE NEED A GOOD CHEAP MECHANIC FOR OUR SPACE SHIP!!! HOW ABOUT YOU?
A SPACE SHIP!! NO WAY!!
LEFT 5 FORMET -- I'M UNDER ARREST AND SHE'S COMMIE ARMPIGS!
PHASAPHLEGMACOP -- BUT YOU CAN CALL ME PHEEBY! MY PARTNER'S AWAECH, NO SPACE MECHANICS, AIN'T COULD BE A PROBLEM!
AW, YOU WANT OTHER 12 METER RACERS! THAT IS THIS BATTLE!
AND SEE AT ALL MY GOOD MAN! EARTH IS EXACTLY WHERE WE WANTED TO BE!
NOW, WHAT AM I GOING TO DO ABOUT THIS PHEEBY -- B.K. THIS SAUCER

it or sell drugs, you owe taxes on it. Did you know that?"

HENRY: Well, this we will label the **T.M. Maple** question. *(Laughter.)* Those who read our letters column will understand that comment. The rest of you should go read our letters column. Since the heroes of the book are thieves, you have to use their counterpart as their enemies, so therefore the cops and so on happen to be the villains of the book. And basically we're just having fun with them, although I personally am making sort of a statement using the I.R.S. guy. He tries to tax everything, as you may or may not have noticed. He would tax nothing if he could get away with it. As a matter of fact, he came up with about 13,000 ways to tax nothing in X-THIEVES #6. In case you did not know this, regardless of how you obtain your money in this country, whether you steal it or get it by selling drugs or whatever, you owe taxes on it. Did you *know* that? So if they catch you for everything else then they can probably get you for tax evasion, too, if you're not paying taxes on your ill-gotten gains.

We thought that was a way to make an interesting twist in X-THIEVES, because they are not paying any taxes on the money they get because they stole the money and they don't like to have the money stolen *back* from them by somebody in an authority position, like the person in the I.R.S. — which of course leads to my philosophy that taxation is theft, which is basically what we're saying here, and he's a *worse* thief than Fred and Bianca are. So far to date I believe he has auctioned off at least one entire planet that fell behind in taxes. So we're using him for our own little statement on taxation as theft.

JULIE: *What's going to be your next target?*

HENRY: Well, actually I haven't planned a next target yet. We've done reality in comic books, we've done the glut, and we've done censorship. For that matter, we did New Coke. But nothing is immediately rearing its head. Mark was saying that he'd like to have an issue parodying superheroes, so I would expect we'll do one of those soon.

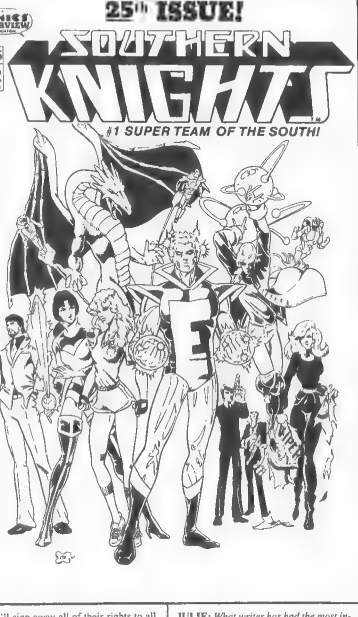
AUDREY: And you're kind of doing that in SOUTHERN KNIGHTS with the Crusaders.

HENRY: Yeah, that's right. In issue #26, the one that Chuck is drawing, we're going to finally meet the Crusaders, the original team that — for those who've been around forever and forever — that forced the Southern Knights to be called the Southern Knights rather than the Crusaders. I like SOUTHERN KNIGHTS as the title far more than CRUSADERS, by the way. But the reason for changing the title was because a comic-book company showed up to say that they had the trademark on that title and they had a comic book called THE CRUSADERS and they wanted us not to use the name.

Well, a fan asked me a little while back when the Southern Knights were going to finally meet the Crusaders, and that made sense to me, so we came up with a group called the Crusaders which is a New York based superhero group, and they are sort of, shall we say, stagnating as superheroes; their merchandising has hit the bottom of the barrel and their comic-book sales have tailed off and they haven't really made any headlines anywhere in the last three or four years. Well, their business manager tells them they're going to have to do something, get something going, so that they can get their revenues back up, or else they're going to run out of money and will have to disband. So their idea is they're going to recruit the Southern Knights to be sort of Junior Crusaders. *(Laughter.)* Since they're making headlines and they have interesting stories and people are interested in what's going on with the Southern Knights, they'll get them to sign their little membership agreement where in the fine print

X-THIEVES GRAPHIC ALBUM, available in June, reprints the Knights & Thieves meeting, and other stories.

"By and large fans are very intelligent, and



they'll sign away all of their rights to all of their likenesses and their adventures and everything, and then Crusaders, Inc. will be able to sell all of their adventures to the comic books, make all of the money off what the Southern Knights are doing. So . . . well, bluntly put, they go down to Atlanta and challenge the Southern Knights to a fight.

AUDREY: In the classic comic-book tradition.

HENRY: That's right. They have to meet just like superheroes meet, by fighting each other. From there things degenerate. *(Laughter.)*

JULIE: *What writer has had the most influence on you?*

HENRY: I can't think of anybody, nobody in particular.

JULIE: *Whose work do you like?*

HENRY: Mike Baron, I like **Mike Baron** a lot. I like **Alan Moore.** I like **Frank Miller's** writing. **Bill Messner-Loebs,** I really like his stuff. As a matter of fact I like everything he's done. I like **Matt Wagner** although GRENDEL kind of got stale, to me anyway. But I like most of the stuff he's written

JULIE: *Who would be your dream artist to work with?*

HENRY: Oh, there's lots of people I'd like to work with. I think it'd be really neat to work with **Ted Boonthanakit,** who does MICRA. I really like Ted's work. It would be nice to work with **Steve Rude** or **George Perez.** George is a great guy, I think he'd be a blast to work with. He's a lot of fun at conventions. I don't know, there's a lot of artists out there. Just for having done it, it would be neat to work with **John Byrne, Bill Sienkiewicz, Frank Miller** — there are so many good artists out there. It would *probably* be fun to work with **Sergio Aragones.**

JULIE: *Most of us who have any interest in comics have attended at least one comic-book convention — what's it like for a writer to go to a con?*

HENRY: It's cheaper. You know, you've got something to do other than patrol the dealers rooms and spend money. It's really a lot of fun. You get to sit on the other side of the table and people come by and totally ignore you, or sometimes they come by and actually stop and talk to you, and you find out what kind of people are reading your book —

AUDREY: And get worried. *(Laughter.)*

HENRY: You meet people from all sorts of backgrounds, and personally I like meeting our fans. All of the fans that I meet are intelligent, they're well read, they have opinions, many of which I agree with.

JULIE: *So you don't exactly take Harlan Ellison's attitude.*

HENRY: No.

AUDREY: By and large, as he said, the fans are very intelligent, and they usually have some very constructive comments. You can tell, they actually sat down and thought about the books, which is very flattering.

HENRY: Yeah. It's nice to have people that actually spend time thinking about something that you've written, even if it's "only a comic book." It's nice that it's actually making a difference, even just a *small* difference, in their lives, a little bright spot or something that they can look forward to. It's neat. It's a lot of fun.

JULIE: *That's better than the convention that starts and ends with, "Can I have your autograph?"*

HENRY: It is. It's neat to sit there and talk with people, actually converse with them. We were sitting at one convention and **Bill Messner-Loebs** came up and asked me to autograph the latest issue of SOUTHERN KNIGHTS, and I thought *that* was *great!* I mean here's a guy, I've been reading all of *his* books and I really like his stuff, and by God he's been reading my book and he likes *my* stuff!

usually have very constructive comments."

That's the kind of thing that makes your day.

AUDREY: And it's nice to be able to talk with other professionals as fellow professionals.

JULIE: *Do you have any con stories?*

HENRY: I don't know that I'd want to repeat them. *(Laughter.)* The major thing that we run into is that as a general rule cons seem to ignore the fact that Audrey exists. We show up and they'll have a badge for me and they won't have anything for Audrey and we have to run all over the place and talk to 50,000 people, and eventually they decide that it's okay. There was one convention that was different, we got there and there were two people handing out the guest badges, and one of them recognized us and the other one, the person we were talking to, didn't have guest badges for us.

AUDREY: They had a badge for our letterer but they didn't have our badges. *(Laughter.)*

JULIE: *What do you do when somebody comes up to you with an idea for what you should do, a story you should write? How do you handle that?*

HENRY: Basically, what I do is say that we've planned pretty much the direction

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"I think anything can work in comics."

we're going with the characters and there is no room to do something like that. I mean I'm not going to say, "We don't want to do that because that's the *dumbest* idea I've ever heard in my entire life." It's just enthusiasm. The fans have enthusiasm, they have ideas they would like to see done, and they can't see it from the same point of view that I can or how unworkable that would be from my point of view. It may not necessarily be stupid, it's just when I look at all of the things that would have to go into it I know it wouldn't work. And it may come from a lesser understanding of the characters only, which they're going to have just because they can only know what's come out so far and don't know what I've got planned yet. But even then there are stupid ideas that you hear sometimes, and I just tell them that there is no way that I could fit it in. You try to be really diplomatic about it. There are people that come up with some really decent ideas, too, and there's no way I can fit them in, either.

JULIE: *What kind of things would you like to see happen in comics in the future?*

HENRY: I'd like to see the field open up more. I love superheroes, I'm writing a superhero comic book, I really enjoy them, but I'd like to see things open up in other areas. I've been a science-fiction fan a lot longer than I've been a comic-book fan. I like to see fantasy. ELF-QUEST is a fantasy that has succeeded. CEREBUS is pretty much a fantasy. So things *are* changing, I'd just like to see it get here faster. If I find something I want to do, I don't want to have to worry about whether there's a potential audience out there or not, I just should worry about if I do it well.

JULIE: *Why do you think science-fiction comics have had such a hard time?*

HENRY: Well, part of it, I think, is that from a literary point of view science fiction is considered to be a ghetto. Well, since everybody's gotta have something to look down on, many people who like science fiction consider comic books to be a ghetto. So a lot of the people who might read and enjoy a science-fiction comic book won't pick them up because of a stigma that they've got. And conversely with the superheroes, while we've got a large audience of young adults there, they may not be into the science fiction. There are people who just don't like science fiction. What we've really got to do, the biggest problem, is to break down the resistance to accepting comic books as a viable form of literature, and once we do that I think we'll have everything wide open.

JULIE: *For some reason it seems to me that science-fiction comic books tend to be more action oriented than regular science fiction.*

HENRY: Well, actually, that's a perception, that comic books need to be more action oriented. You don't find a lot of comic books that involve a lot of people standing around talking — it's a visual medium. Well, think about the successful science-fiction movies, STAR WARS for instance — not what you would call a standing-around-talking-a-lot movie. 2001 is different, is not like that, but it was not nearly as successful as STAR WARS was, either

AUDREY: It's how well the medium translates. A lot of the best science fiction involves invoking of feeling or mood, and that's real hard to do when you're dealing with pictures. It's *easy* with words, it's not so easy with pictures. And when you get into science fiction, you draw a spacecraft, big deal. But when you describe it you can show how *wonderful* a spacecraft is. Even if you don't have that much room, in two sentences you can describe a wonderful spacecraft.

HENRY: In comic books it's the merging of words and pictures, and there's got to be something in that picture. I've got to admit that I am not interested in reading a comic book that just has two people sitting down talking all through the book. But it's just the perception of the medium that

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"Stick with your own concepts."

we need to have action. That's one of the things that I actually run into, because I've been told by people like my editor, for instance, that I need more action in my plots. That's something that comes with the territory; it *has* to be visually appealing. Every now and then — just to use movies as a similar thing — you'll hear about these movies like MY DINNER WITH ANDRE and so on, and the critics just love it, great stuff, and a lot of people don't go to see it because it's two people sitting in a restaurant talking to each other.

So, I do not know why people have not tried some of the more traditional science fiction, because there's a lot of science fiction that involves action but doesn't have to be space opera. It's just that space opera happens to be a pretty easy form of action to do, and I think that has something to do with it. But I think anything *can* work in comics, it's just that people aren't willing to give it the chance right now. Someday.

JULIE: *MICRA is science fiction —*

HENRY: Yes, with superhero overtones.

JULIE: *Why do you think MICRA seems to have broken the mold? Is it the superhero element?*

HENRY: I think so.

AUDREY: That's part of it, and part of it is Ted's artwork. Ted's work is beautiful, it should be hanging in a museum somewhere

JULIE: *How do you think writing comics is different from writing prose?*

HENRY: This is my theory on why comics, especially action-oriented comics, could conceivably be considered better than just regularly-written prose: When you write a comic book, first you concentrate on the story and just the story. I do a plot. I work on the action, how the story will flow, and rudimentary dialogue so that the artist knows what I'm looking for. And then when I have the pencilled pages in front of me, I can concentrate all of my energy on the dialogue. So it's more of a two-part writing process, whereas if you're writing prose, while you have lots of rewriting going on there, as you're going along when it comes time for somebody to say something, dammit, they've got to say something right there and you haven't even finished the story. With comics, the way I do it with the plot and then the script, I've already finished the story, the story is done, and now I've just got to get the dialogue in there to convey that story.

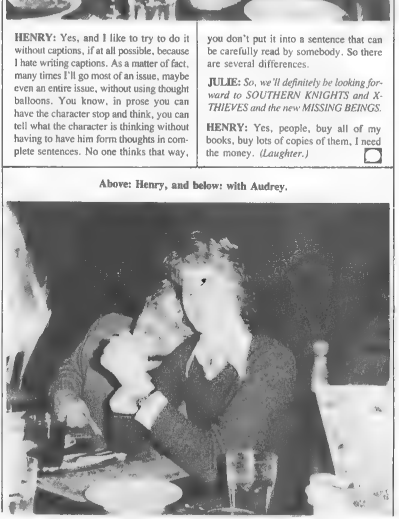
AUDREY: And another thing is that with comics you have to use the very minimum amount of words to get the maximum effect.

HENRY: Yes, and I like to try to do it without captions, if at all possible, because I hate writing captions. As a matter of fact, many times I'll go most of an issue, maybe even an entire issue, without using thought balloons. You know, in prose you can have the character stop and think, you can tell what the character is thinking without having to have him form thoughts in complete sentences. No one thinks that way, you don't put it into a sentence that can be carefully read by somebody. So there are several differences.

JULIE: *So, we'll definitely be looking forward to SOUTHERN KNIGHTS and X-THIEVES and the new MISSING BEINGS.*

HENRY: Yes, people, buy all of my books, buy lots of copies of them, I need the money. *(Laughter.)*

Above: Henry, and below: with Audrey.



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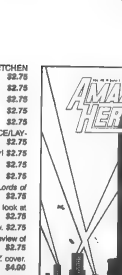

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"This is like a group of friends, you almost

get the feeling that they grew up together."

WILLIE PEPPERS

When DAK asked Willie Peppers who he would like to interview him, Willie requested me — a compliment to say the least. I first came to know of Willie when I signed on as editor of SOUTHERN KNIGHTS, starting with issue #17. I was really amazed by the quality of his artwork. That Willie was self-taught and had already achieved so much told me that this man is not just a tremendously talented artist — but also one who is destined to achieve a very significant name for himself in the industry. My belief grows because, with each new story that Willie has tackled, I have seen extraordinary improvement in his storytelling, in every aspect of his drawing.

It is very rare to see such a talented person at this early stage in his career and to be able to help him along, and I am very happy to be working with Willie both as the editor of SOUTHERN KNIGHTS and as a collaborator on a project of our own, MAGNA-MAN, THE LAST SUPERHERO. Willie is an incredible guy, a soft-spoken man who writes some of the best letters I've ever read, and one of these days I expect to see him credited as a writer/artist along with John Byrne and Frank Miller and Walt Simonson and the others of that special rank . . .

DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN: *How did you find out about the SOUTHERN KNIGHTS?*

WILLIE PEPPERS: I had seen some of the ads in BUYER'S GUIDE, they were running ads where they would sort of spotlight each member, and aside from that I hadn't heard anything about it, hadn't seen an issue or anything. Then I went to a convention and met **David Willis** there, who was the letterer at the time, and he saw some of my stuff. He said he would have **Henry Vogel** get in touch with me and see if we could arrange anything. I got home and pretty much forgot about it, then a couple of months later I got a letter from Henry asking if I was interested in doing a couple of backup stories, and I was ecstatic! *(Laughter.)* He sent me all of the issues up to that point so that I could become familiar with the characters, and the rest is history.

DWIGHT: *Have you attended many conventions?*

WILLIE: Not as many as I would like. I've hit Chicago about five times since 1980, and there are two conventions that are held here every year, and there have been a few others scattered around.

DWIGHT: *Well, as an artist who would go into a convention with portfolio in hand to show around, what was that like for you?*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Willie Lewis Peppers
Born: 27 June 1959 — Louisville, KY
Occupation: Comic-Book Artist
Art Education: Self-Taught
Comic Book Most Influence By: FANTASTIC FOUR
Superhero Identifies With Most: Victor von Doom
Favorite SOUTHERN KNIGHTS Characters: Dragon and Dread
Favorite SOUTHERN KNIGHTS Story: Issue #8
Favorite Non-Comics Pastime: Advanced Dungeons & Dragons
Favorite Movies: ORDINARY PEOPLE: THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL
Favorite Color: Black
Question Most Asked While On Tour of Comic-Book Shops: Believe it or not, "Can you teach me how to draw?"
Reply: "No."
Recommendation To Aspiring Artists: Go to an art school. But remember, if you think you can go to an art school and learn how to draw, there has to be something there to begin with. But the old sheepskin never hurts
Favorite Denomination of Money: The $20 is nice, especially when there's a lot of them. Anything bigger than a $20 is hard to manage, not that I wouldn't mind trying.

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IS HE MAN . . .
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"Being a mutant isn't unusual, it's common."

WILLIE: Very very *very* frustrating, extremely so, but not to the point of giving up. I've known some who have — but for me, no way.

DWIGHT: *What's the frustrating aspect of it? Are you going up there looking for creative input, or are you expecting an editor to say, "This is great, you want work?"*

WILLIE: Mainly I guess the thing I was hoping to hear would be something on the order of, "Wait until I get back to my office and send me a portfolio." I understand that at a convention there's so much going on that they can't really get into somebody's portfolio, but some of the things I've run into are just ridiculous. For example, at a Chicago convention I went to two or three years ago I showed some of my stuff around and **Name Artist** looked through five or six pages out of the twenty or so, looked at me and said, "Who are you working for right now?" I said, "Nobody." Then he bundled up all of the pages and handed them back to me and pointed down to the end of the table to **Name Editor** and said, "Take 'em down there to him, show 'em to him, tell him I sent you."

I took them down there, showed them to him, told him **Name Artist** had thought it was good, so he looks at maybe two pages and hands it back to me, tells me to go to New York and show my stuff around, then he turns around and starts a conversation with somebody else. And this whole time a crowd had been gathering behind me — as soon as **Name Artist** said to tell **Name Editor** he'd sent me, I must have had about fifteen people behind me whispering, "He's gonna get a job, he's gonna get a job!" *(Laughter.)* And, you know, if he had said the stuff sucked *that* would have been okay, but to just casually put it off like that was ... not devastating, more infuriating than anything else. You know, he could have said I should work on it or this isn't quite what they were looking for, but to just look at two pages halfheartedly and hand them back to me! I went back to **Name Artist** and he said not to pay any attention, he's like that sometimes. But they're not the only people in the business, and look where I am now!

DWIGHT: *When you first read SOUTHERN KNIGHTS, what were your impressions? What really grabbed you?*

WILLIE: Right off it was Dragon, that was the very *first* thing that caught my attention — because of the fact that it was a dragon, as opposed to a guy who could turn into a dragon. I thought that was a great switch, a dragon who became human. I also liked that Electrode was a guy who definitely set out to become a superhero — that was original. Kristin I was unsure about, and like even now I'm still wondering about her. I'm assuming she's a mutant — and that's one word I'm beginning to hate. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Why is that?*

WILLIE: It seems like *everybody* is a mutant nowadays. I think it's being overdone. Something I've been hearing — and I'm beginning to agree with it — was that the big problem with "The Fall of the Mutants" was the fact that there were mutants left when it was done. It's become a fad, it seems, and now being a mutant isn't something *unusual*, it's *common*. It's like being a mutant is the norm now, like if you're not a mutant then something's wrong with you! *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Well, we digressed a bit. How about Connie?*

WILLIE: Connie I feel has a great deal of potential, like I could see a lot that could happen there. I like the idea of the psychic sword, but then again, as with Kristin, I have to assume she's a mutant. *(Laughter.)* But it doesn't seem like a mutant as much, in the case of Connie, because it's more of a psychic ability as opposed to the usual physical thing. With Kristin it's the strength and the moderate invulnerability, with Connie it's something more mental. You could almost argue the point that she's not necessarily a mutant, being that it's a mental power instead having to do with the untapped area of the brain. It

"Dragon was the very first thing that caught my attention,

would only be natural that if somebody could access more of that, they might find some sort of power there. I could probably argue both sides, which is one of my biggest problems *(Laughter.)*

There are still a few questions I have as far as their abilities are concerned, just little interesting things. For example, when Dragon transforms into a human, is his clothing part of his dragonskin? If you rip off his shirtsleeve will he have a wound when he becomes Dragon again? That's always been in the back of my mind, little things like that

DWIGHT: *We'll have to ask Henry about that! What for you is the greatest untapped potential in SOUTHERN KNIGHTS?*

WILLIE: Hm, interesting. Well, at the moment it seems that everything is going in the direction necessary to cover all of the bases. Whatever hasn't been done, the book seems to be going in the direction to get it done. It's moving at a very satisfactory pace in the sense of how the stories are coming together. Well, there is one thing that is bothering me, the Aramis situation — that might be a source of potential that's yet to be unleashed. Is he a Southern Knight or what? Is he going to stay around or is he going to fade off or what?

DWIGHT: *Or become Dark Aramis?*

WILLIE: *I don't* want to see that! *(Laughter.)* That would be terrible; that's another thing that's been done to death. I would like to see the Aramis character firm up more, he seems to be a loose end in SOUTHERN KNIGHTS right now. The group as a whole is great, it's cohesive, but it seems like there's this little disassociated string *hanging* on them, and that's Aramis. Is he going to become part of the fabric or are they going to snip him off?

that was a great switch, a dragon who became human."

DWIGHT: *Now that you'll be the steady artist on the series, what visually do you intend to do with SOUTHERN KNIGHTS?*

WILLIE: I would like to try to do *something* with Dragon. I'm not sure what yet. The way I draw Dragon now is heavily influenced by the way **Butch Guice** did it in the early issues. So far I think *that* was Dragon, and I try to base my interpretation on that. But I would like to try to do something with Dragon that would more or less be *my* contribution. Like right now I think it's a combination of **Guice**'s Dragon and a *basic* dragon, and I would like to have a **Willie Peppers** Dragon! Then maybe sometime when somebody else picks up the book they'll say, "I wanna do it like **Peppers** did it!" Ego, here? No way. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *You must have had a real field day then when you were asked to be the artist on the DRAGON mini-series last year.*

WILLIE: Oh yeah, definitely. First off, I have always thought that Dragon was the most *fascinating* member, for the reasons I stated before, the fact that he is a dragon. And I looked at that as a challenge, in the sense that through all these years I'd been used to doing just superheroes, so I saw that as a chance to do something else. I mean Dragon is *technically* a superhero, you know, but there's no cape or boots or costume — not to mention I *love* drawing his head! *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *It was with that third DRAGON issue I think that you really hit your stride, with that story, with that mini-series. It seemed like everything really clicked there.*

WILLIE: The third one? Oddly enough, the third one is *my* favorite issue of the mini-series, but the fourth one is my favorite cover. I don't know what it is about it, I guess maybe it was the pressure. *(Laughter.)* That's the quickest cover I've ever done, because it was about 11:00 that night I got the call from DAK, "We need the cover now!" And I got it in the mail the next day.

DWIGHT: *You also drew yourself into each of the DRAGON stories, is that something you enjoy doing?*

WILLIE: Oh, yeah.

DWIGHT: *Who were you in all four issues?*

WILLIE: Oh, gee. In #1 I was up on the balcony on the splash page. In #2, that was the Musketeers issue, I was on the splash page — it's been a few centuries since I did those issues. *(Laughter.)* In #3, I was the chief, and of course in #4 I was one of the shipmates.

DWIGHT: *How did it feel, you know, when you went on that tour of comic-book shops to promote the DRAGON mini-series?*

WILLIE: That was great, that was *fun!* I was surprised at the age ranges of the people coming in and picking that up. It was pretty much like the old saying, "from six to sixty."

DWIGHT: *So it really cut across a pretty wide range of readership?*

WILLIE: Definitely, surprisingly so; and everybody, of course, grabbed the whole set. *(Laughter.)* That was a very interesting experience. Actually, that type of experience was one of the major attractions to me for being a comic-book artist, just getting to meet people and see what they think of your work. But I suppose, you know, anybody in the business would have to be that way. I mean, what is being a comic-book artist, if it's not getting the material in front of the people to get their reaction to it? Nobody wants to sit in a corner and do comics that nobody ever sees, even though I have done quite a number that way.

DWIGHT: *You also designed the logo and border for DRAGON.*

WILLIE: That was fun. I have always loved doing logos, I'm crazy about logos.

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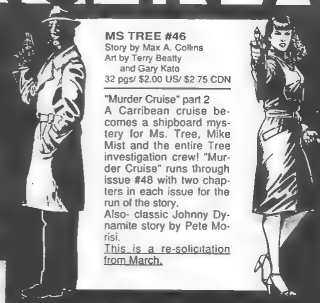

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"This has been a dream for too long to let anything stop me."

I usually will do a logo the same way I will do a costume design; if I sit down and just try to create something it turns out far less than my expectations, but if I can start talking about it, thinking about what I want to do, and just let something *hit* me, you know, and then just get a basic sketch down on paper before I forget it, that usually gives me the best results. Like the SOUTHERN KNIGHTS logo — that was totally accidental. That surprised me because I wasn't submitting a new logo for SOUTHERN KNIGHTS

DWIGHT: *Oh, you just did the thing up?*

WILLIE: Yeah. After I did the second backup story I did a Southern Knights poster because I had the extra time, and I just put a new logo on there and sent it off to Henry — it was more or less this friendship offering, I guess you could say — and all of a sudden DAK decided he wanted to use that logo.

DWIGHT: *What makes the Southern Knights different from all of the other superhero groups around?*

WILLIE: I think there is a certain degree of believability in the book. It seems that in most team books one of the major subplots is some kind of, you know, inner team conflict — there's always two or three characters that don't get along — and I think that's getting rather old. There's none of that in SOUTHERN KNIGHTS. This is a group of friends, you almost get the feeling that they grew up together. Also they have the Hampton House as opposed to some super-high-tech base of operations, which is so typical. And they have to worry about the normal everyday things, you know; they do have normal lives. It would make a great TV series. *(Laughter.)* How about the SOUTHERN KNIGHTS movie?

DWIGHT: *You've been drawing for quite a few years now, you're not fresh out of high school or anything like that?*

WILLIE: No.

DWIGHT: *Have you done any work in the commercial art field?*

WILLIE: I would have to say that 98% of it has been plugging away on the comics. There was a long stretch doing fanzines. Before that, it was just sitting at home and drawing my own comics. Some of them are pretty awful. I guess I must have done close to 100 during the years, and I have maybe 30 of them left, the rest were strategically destroyed. *(Laughter.)* I would get an idea for a story, maybe just one germ of an idea, sometimes just a single panel, and I would sit up all night and draw an entire comic just to put that one panel in it. I would get started at 10:00 at night and around 6.00 or 7:00 in the morning I would be finished, and then maybe an hour after that I would start on another one. I did everything from IRON MAN to DEADLY HANDS OF KUNG FU. *(Laughter.)* I would individually number and date my issues, too. It's embarrassing, but luckily nobody will ever see them

A page of Peppers' pencils for SOUTHERN KNIGHTS #25.

DWIGHT: *You must have had pretty tolerant parents to let you do that.*

WILLIE: Well, I was always encouraged. I've always credited my brother for me drawing. He was an artist and he and his friends would get together and draw, and I wanted to be part of the crowd so I would try to draw with them, and as the years went by they stopped and I didn't.

DWIGHT: *Who do you consider to be the strongest influences on your art?*

WILLIE: **Kirby** is at the top of the list. I was one of those people who would *kill* in the name of **Kirby!** *(Laughter.)* I would offer sacrifices. Then, let's see … well, I am still one of the few admitted **Byrne** worshippers. It seems that more and more people are starting to shy away from actually *admitting* that they like his art, but not me!

DWIGHT: *How would you critique John Byrne's art?*

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"I would kill in the name of Kirby!"

WILLIE: Well, what originally attracted me to it is that it has a certain difference, it has a *look!* It's hard to explain. First off, he has a slightly peculiar way of doing proportions, he has a tendency to do the huge torsos and somewhat small legs, but it works, I like the way he does that. Of course, it could easily be anatomically ridiculed, but aesthetically I find it appealing as opposed to the usual run-of-the-mill basic artwork. It has a certain *flair* to it that I have found in *very* few other artists. There's not that many out there that I particularly like, my list is extremely short — *extremely* short!

DWIGHT: *What do you think of Frank Miller's storytelling?*

WILLIE: I could say the same thing for **Miller,** — anatomically it's off, but it just has a certain aesthetic to it. In a lot of ways visually it's unrealistic, but it's very entertaining, it has an appealing difference, it's far from typical. You can't say **Miller's** art looks like so-and-so's art, it has a *definite* individuality to it. I think that's what makes it more attractive than just skill. I think the greatest appeal is not a case of how good or bad it's done, it's the fact that it's done like nobody *else* does it. I had the same opinion of **Sienkiewicz** at one time.

DWIGHT: *What do you mean by that?*

WILLIE: Well, the first time I saw his work was when he did some issues of FANTASTIC FOUR, and I thought, you know, "This guy does a great **Neal Adams** imitation." **Neal Adams** had always been one of my favorites. Then I saw the MOON KNIGHT issues that he did, and then he started doing his own style and it was different. Like with **Miller,** you know, I said, "Hey, this is great!" But then at one point it stepped over the line.

DWIGHT: *What point was that?*

WILLIE: When I saw ELEKTRA: ASSASSIN.

DWIGHT: *Oh? What did you not like about that?*

WILLIE: I think it was *too* different. I wouldn't go so far as to say abstract, but it was ... it required concentration to get into it. If you have to concentrate to get into a comic, then something's wrong. You more or less have to look at it and then break it down and *then* try to understand it, and nobody wants to go through that much work to read a comic.

DWIGHT: *But of course what they were doing there was hardly something that was intended for a younger audience.*

WILLIE: True, true. I have no problems with the strong themes and things of that nature, it's just artistically it was too

Grimjack ala Willie circa '84.

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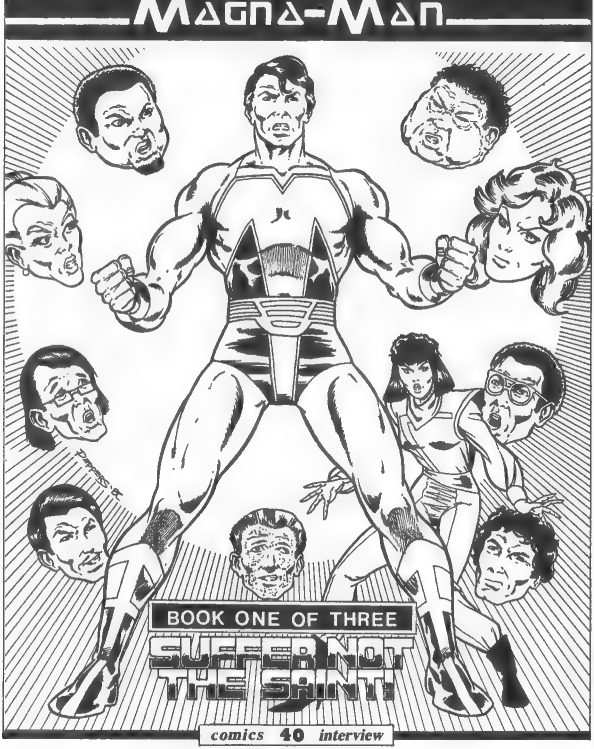
"If you have to concentrate to get

radical I mean, I'm still trying to force myself to complete reading the set, I couldn't get any further than the first two.
DWIGHT: *Well, they just came out with a trade paperback edition collecting everything between two covers.*
WILLIE: Yeah, that might make it easier.
DWIGHT: *What writer would you like to draw for?*
WILLIE: I would probably have to say ... **Claremont.** *(Laughter.)*
DWIGHT: *Why is that? After going into such a big anti-mutant thing, you know, why would you want to —*
WILLIE: Well, I like his writing, speak-



Magna-Man © 1988 Zimmerman & Kraft

into a comic something's wrong."

Dragon and the Knights, pencils from #25.

ing of style as opposed to content. I like the *way* he writes, I'm just sick of mutants. You know, I would love to see him do something else that has nothing to do with mutants.

DWIGHT: *Well, Willie, you and I are working on a project.*

WILLIE: Yeah. MAGNA-MAN!

DWIGHT: *THE LAST SUPERHERO. I've really been impressed with the stuff you've been coming up with on it, there's a real joy in your pencils. It's like this is the epitome of the superhero for you.*

WILLIE: Well in a nutshell it's the story I've been waiting for, it's *the* superhero. It's by no means typical, the characters are *extremely* colorful. That was another case of letting it happen. Rather than trying to sit down and just draw them, I would just read the character descriptions and sketch out what would come to mind from those descriptions, and I've been very pleased with the way they've turned out.

DWIGHT: *The only problem that we've had so far is trying to get Sigmund down, Magna-Man's servant, butler, counsellor, friend.*

WILLIE: Argh — don't you just love it with them wondering what we're talking about! *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Well, in many respects this mini-series is very different from what you're doing on SOUTHERN KNIGHTS.*

WILLIE: Definitely. I've always been more attracted to singular characters as opposed to groups. Up until SOUTHERN KNIGHTS I was fairly down on groups, because of the things I said before, inner team conflicts and such. I would say just give me one *good* character and I would be happy, and Magna-Man is it. He is the quintessential superhero.

DWIGHT: *But aside from the mini-series, it's the SOUTHERN KNIGHTS that'll be graced by the Peppers pencils. You wouldn't give that up for the world — or would you?*

WILLIE: Oh, no way. This has been a dream for too long to let anything stop me.

DWIGHT: *Where does Willie Peppers see himself five years from now?*

WILLIE: Five years from now, president of Chrysler *(Laughter.)* I would like to be, as far as company work is concerned, either at Marvel or a very affluent Comics Interview. *(Laughter.)*

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"We are continuing to battle this idea that comic books are just for kids."

MARVEL

STEVE SAFFEL & PAMELA RUTT

"Quick! Hide the wedding dress!" cried Pam Rutt as I entered her office. With one motion, she swooped up the designer's sketch of Mary Jane Watson's wedding gown, as it was to appear in the 1987 SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL, and buried it under a pile of other papers in her office. That mission of secrecy completed, she, Steve Saffel, and I sat down to an hour or so of conversation about the world of promotion and publicity in the modern comics industry. That hour was interrupted by several phone calls, as Pam and Steve dealt with the problems of the day.

PATRICK DANIEL O'NEILL: *How do you people see your job — is it communicating about comics to the "great unwashed," who are not regular comics readers, or is it keeping the hard-core fans informed?*

STEVE SAFFEL: I would say "yes". *(Laughter.)* We have a tremendous audience out there who would read comic books, would enjoy comic books, but don't know that comic books still exist, simply because, for so many years, so many distribution channels have dried up. They assumed comic books went away when, in reality, comic books were in the middle of a renaissance. Now, we're trying really hard to bring back their awareness, through new channels of distribution, and with that comes a great need for promotion and publicity.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name. Pamela Rutt

Occupation: Publicity director, Marvel Comics

Education: BA, English, George Washington University, Washington, DC

Experience: Formerly public relations director, Philip Stogel Co., Inc.

Pet Peeve: Having her picture taken

Name: Steve Saffel

Occupation: Promotion manager, Marvel Comics

Education: BS, News Editorial Journalism, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV

Experience: Assistant public relations director, American Red Cross Tri-State Regional Blood Center, Huntington, WV

All art accompanying this interview is © 1988 MEG

"The X-MEN Writers and Artist Tour

At the same time, we have a lot of readers who did stay with comics. We can't ignore them; we can't ignore the people who supported us all along, and who genuinely enjoy what we do. So, we have a certain level of obligation to keep them aware of what we're working on. By concentrating on that audience, we can find out what they need, what they want; we can keep their enthusiasm up and make certain we connect the product with its existing audience.

PAT: *In that split between communicating with the public-at-large and with the hard-core fan — for years, you seemed to be concentrating on the fans, and only recently has there been a push to get into the general press...*

PAMELA RUTT: I have to take exception to that. I'm here for almost eight years, and my efforts have been devoted almost exclusively to reaching the general consumer. I think that's the division of labor between Steve and me.

STEVE: I think you're also, just now, seeing the culmination of Pam's efforts for the last few years. All of a sudden, the awareness is there, and a lot of that comes from Pam's having plugged away at it for years and years until finally they're listening.

PAT: *Pam, are you finding that the media are now coming to you when something happens, as opposed to you having to go to them?*

PAM: I find that to be truest in the business sense; that there is more interest at the moment in comic books as an industry as a business story — for business publications, for the business pages of newspapers, for the spate of new business television shows — than ever before. On the non-business stories, there has always been a fair amount of both soliciting their interest as well as interest coming in over the transom.

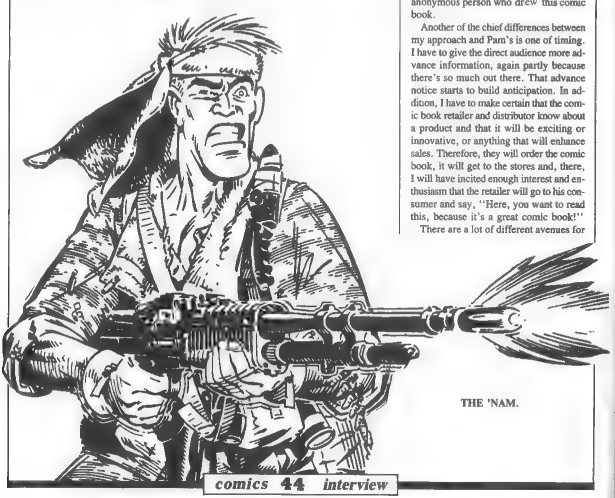
PAT: *When you're approaching a particular topic, say something like THE 'NAM, for the general audience, and for the comic book audience, how do you approach it? Is there a different focus to what you'll try to get across to each market?*

PAM: Yes, I think so. For me, I am most often emphasizing the social, or historical, or literary, or whatever, significance of the particular project. Or the innovation of the project, like bringing the story of THE 'NAM to comics all together. I can't honestly say that we have been as successful as I might like to be, for instance, in making the creators a story. In other words, the consumer media will ask me, "How did Marvel go about developing the story?" just as they might ask an author, but they will not ask, "Who is the penciler? Who is the inker?" There is not that awareness yet.

STEVE: One of the chief differences between Pam's job and mine is that I have to make any given project stand out among a sea of product, because there is so much offered today. Therefore, I am going to accentuate some of those details — the fact that **Michael Golden** was drawing THE 'NAM would be of great interest to the existing comic book reader, because they remembered **Golden**'s work on MICRONAUTS. On the other hand, for the mass media, **Michael Golden** was just an anonymous person who drew this comic book.

Another of the chief differences between my approach and Pam's is one of timing. I have to give the direct audience more advance information, again partly because there's so much out there. That advance notice starts to build anticipation. In addition, I have to make certain that the comic book retailer and distributor know about a product and that it will be exciting or innovative, or anything that will enhance sales. Therefore, they will order the comic book, it will get to the stores and, there, I will have incited enough interest and enthusiasm that the retailer will go to his consumer and say, "Here, you want to read this, because it's a great comic book!"

There are a lot of different avenues for



THE 'NAM.

got a great deal of local coverage."

me to do that, and I have to do it before the comic book comes out. Pam, on the other hand, will go out and try to get interest in the book, once it is actually available. If she does it too soon, people will go to their local newsstand, or their local comic-book store, looking for a title that doesn't exist yet. Since these people are, hopefully, new consumers, they're going to get discouraged. They're not going to come back week after week, hoping to find this comic book. The thing that will cement them to that store, for this comic book, is reading that first issue.

PAM: The thing that is unique to this business is that what have come to be dubbed the "fanzines" serve as trade magazines as well as consumer magazines.

PAT: *I was just going to say that Dave Kraft and I have been campaigning to change that designation. "Fanzine" was a great name back when people were doing them as hobbies. The vast majority of publications about comic books today are being done as full-time jobs by the people who do them. Maybe it's time to stop thinking of them as fanzines, and realize that they are a trade press going to the trade and the interested reader and collector.*

PAM: I can't think of that parallel in any other business.

PAT: *No, there isn't. I work in the "regular" trade press, for a magazine covering office supplies and equipment, and the average person buying pens and pencils is not buying my magazine, but the guy who sells them is.*

STEVE: Oddly enough, I think there's been a flip in the nature of fanzines. Fanzines, in the beginning, were magazines published by fans; now they're magazines published for fans — but the title has remained the same.

PAT: *We mentioned THE 'NAM, and this brings something else to mind. About the same time you were trying — and to some extent, succeeding — to get some press for that title, out came the movie PLATOON. A big deal was made that Oliver Stone, the writer-director of PLATOON, was basing it on his own experiences in Viet Nam. Were you ever able to do the same thing for Doug Murray?*

PAM: I think that was always an element of the story — that our book, too, was being written by a vet, and that it was, to a large extent, based on his own experiences, as well as research about the times. I don't think we had any problem with that; we got the same attention paid to that detail.

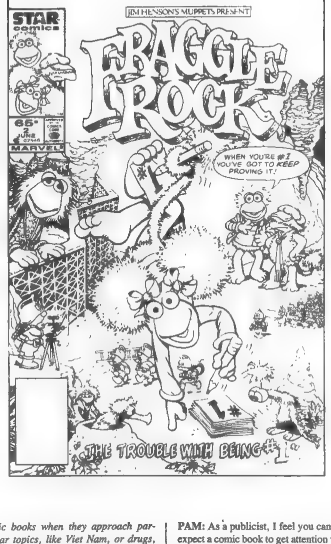
PAT: *Does it bother either of you that — since the general press is interested in comic books when they approach particular topics, like Viet Nam, or drugs, such as the POWER PACK stories that have gotten some attention...*

PAM: You saw that — good.

PAT: *Yeah, I saw the piece on WCBS here in New York. Does it bother you that that creates an impression — or I think it might create an impression — in the public mind, that comic books only show up when they're got something dramatic to display?*

PAM: What do you mean "show up?" Show up in the media?

PAT: *In the media, or... I have this feeling that, as Steve said, a large part of the public has this idea that comic books stopped being published twenty years ago...and that now they think comic books are only published when they have something dramatic to show.*



PAM: As a publicist, I feel you can only expect a comic book to get attention when there is something newsworthy about it. You can only expect any topic to get attention when there's something newsworthy about it. And as a consumer, I think of comic books as just part of the American fabric; just as I know there are books, I know there are *comic* books. Unless there is an extraordinary book, it's not going to be the subject of a news piece.

PAT: *I would argue that that is not necessarily so.*

PAM: You mean in terms of comic books being reviewed regularly in the general press...

PAT: *Yes. Or, for example, the most nondescript writers go out on book tours and show up on local talk shows. You may never have heard of them before, but there*

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"Ninety percent of everything is crap."

they are on a local talk show, because...

PAM: That's not true. When you consider how many books are out there, the number of authors that you see on the air is minuscule compared to the number of titles published. **Robert Ludlum** or **Danielle Steele** may get themselves on to the TODAY SHOW with some frequency, but there are hundreds and hundreds of more anonymous book writers behind them.

STEVE: Also, you tend to find that a great number of the comic book writers and artists receive a good deal of play when they go out on the road. When we sent the various and sundry X-MEN-related writers and artist on tour in January 1987, we found that we got a great deal of local coverage. The same thing tends to happen when we send one of our major writers or artists to a convention. In that sense, comic book writers and artists get a great deal of play, again, when there is a local hook of some sort, that is prompted by their appearance in the community.

PAT: *Other than your own efforts, why do you think the media has become interested in comics over the last eight to ten years, after a long time of no interest? For example, why has it become an important business story?*

PAM: Because there is a resurgence; because there is suddenly growth in an industry that was, for many years, drowning. I think that's what the business stories are about. I think that more interesting things are being done in comics, comics are better quality, they're dealing with far more interesting topics. Now that comics are being edited for broader audiences, both young and old, one of the stories that the media are fond of is "comic books are becoming more adult." I have no problem with that as a story; I think it's marvelous. I think, as a medium, comics can be used creatively and appeal to a very broad spectrum. I only mind that story when it makes it appear that the adult appeal is to the exclusion of the younger market. I think it's also important to remind the public that there are still comic books for young kids that are light-hearted, and funny, and more like the comic books they remember from their youth.

I also think that the fact that comic books are a print medium — with words — serves them well at this point. I think there is an awareness that Americans are so involved with other forms of entertainment that kids are no longer reading — that means there is more attention, more reverence, paid to the written word.

PAT: *Any further comment on that, Steve?*

STEVE: One other factor might be that a lot of the people who were reading comic books — particularly with the Marvel rise in the 1960s — are now the people who are controlling the media. I think a lot of people who **Stan Lee** and his cohorts brought into comic books are now covering the medium they grew up with.

PAM: I'm delighted to hear that you think there's that much more attention...

PAT: *For example, there was a point about a year ago when it seemed like every business publication was doing a story about comics. Where did that come from?*

STEVE: I have one other thing to add. I think another reason there's been so much more attention recently is that, with the variety of products we are producing, we are able to put out a lot of hooks. We're able to present the media with a lot of different options. One strength that our publicity program — and Pam's work in particular — has is the ability to get a broad variety of articles out there, thus showing many aspects of our line, not just focusing on one or two titles, of one or two articles a year. I think you will find it's a much more full-fledged publicity coverage.

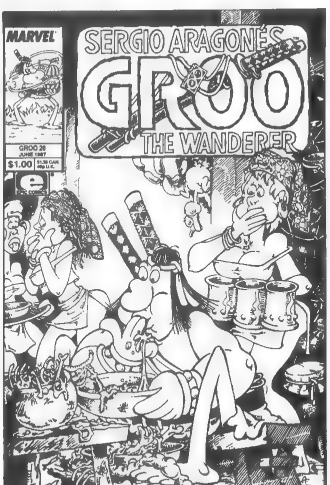
PAM: Aren't comic books better? Aren't they more intelligent?

PAT: *I think like everything they run the gamut. Steve would be familiar with Ted Sturgeon's Law...*

STEVE AND PAT: "Ninety percent of everything is crap."

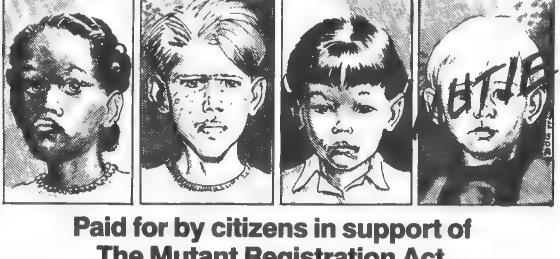
PAM: Okay, I'll buy that.

PAT: *Sturgeon originally proposed it in the guest of honor speech at a science fic-*



"I think parents should always watch

IT'S 1987. DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOUR CHILDREN ARE?



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tion convention. He said, "Ninety percent of science fiction is crap." Of course, the audience gasped. "But, naturally," Sturgeon continued, "ninety percent of everything *is crap."*

STEVE: In that case, I think we test Sturgeon's Law, because I think we do a little better than ten percent that isn't crap.

PAT: *Let me get into something very specific to my business -- is there anything about the trade press, or fanzines, or whatever you want to call them, that particularly bothers you? That you think should be improved, or is problematic for you in your own jobs?*

PAM: I would never want to address the trade press as a lump, and I would never want to cast any specific aspersions, either...

STEVE: I think one of the problems we have is that the trade press is very, very interested -- they want to learn everything they can as soon as they can. We do everything we can to cooperate with them, but it just comes down to there being so many hours in a day, and we have a lot of different campaigns and promotions that we work on every single day. We can't deliver everything that we would like to. If there's one problem, it's just that there's too much.

On the other hand, I think it's been getting better and better, and I haven't really had a major request of recent vintage that I haven't been able to help on in some way -- since we did some internal restructuring, and spread the work out, so that everyone is working on a little more sane level. Relatively speaking.

PAT: *Where does a publication like STARLOG fall into the mix? It's not a fanzine, because it's published by a company with interests beyond comics; it's a monthly newsstand magazine, right alongside your comic books; but it isn't TIME and NEWSWEEK, either.*

PAM: I would generally defer a STARLOG inquiry to Steve, because of his far greater knowledge of the product.

STEVE: I think, also, STARLOG addresses fans -- so it is a fanzine, that is "a magazine for fans" -- but a very broad audience of fans, a much larger segment of the public. As a result, I think it's the kind of thing where I would work with them as closely as I could. I work with STARLOG more these days because STARLOG has been showing a much greater interest in comics than in the past.

PAT: *Pam, do you see your job as being to promote the Marvel Comics titles as a whole, specific titles when something comes up, or is your job to promote comic books in general?*

PAM: I think I do all of the above. I think we do institutional publicity. It's always good to do anything that puts comic books in a positive light. I have to assume that, because we do it better than anybody else, eventually that will translate to more sales for us. Even publicity that starts out as seemingly institutional has an impact on Marvel's sales.

Yes, there are times when I am looking to have an impact on sales of a specific title, or even a specific issue of a specific title -- always with the hope that the reader will then stay with that title, and move on to others.

PAT: *I don't think I have to ask you that, Steve, because with the market you're targeting, you're more likely publicizing a specific title or issue, rather than comics in general, because your audience is already aware of them.*

STEVE: Frequently so. There is a large portion of my audience that is already inclined toward Marvel in general. There is a portion of my audience that is very discriminating, and I have to tell them why they would be interested in a specific title. Again, one of the advantages I have is that Marvel has a very broad line, with something for just about every reader -- from the person who enjoys MUPPET BABIES to the one who enjoys MOONSHADOW. To a great degree, I just have to figure out which of those portions of the audience will like each individual product.

PAT: *Let me go back to something that Pam said earlier. You were talking about*

what their kids read — comics or not."

the fact that you want to make people aware that, while comic books are now appealing to an older audience, there is still a wide range running from adolescence to just-reading level.

There has been a great deal of play in the trade press on what that higher adult level of material, including things like ELEKTRA: ASSASSIN, has meant on the retailer's level, in terms of his vulnerability to outside pressure. What do either of you see that you can do, as publicity and promotion people, to allay the fears of some parts of the public that comic books are no longer suitable for children as a whole — or to help the retailer understand that he carries a range of books, and that he must be aware of who the target audience might be for any specific title?

PAM: *(gesturing to Steve to answer first):* It's a hard question.

STEVE: I think we do a great deal to address this concern — and always have. We have a sales force that works with our office, and makes certain that the retailer is informed. This means making certain that any comic books that would not be accessible to the widest possible audience are noted, in the order form, the press mailings, and any other communications that might be necessary. We also have a variety of imprints that, by themselves, allow the retailer and distributor to be informed and educated. The fact that Epic Comics exists, as a line, indicates to the retailer and distributor, "Look at this imprint. This is the one you should take some care with to ascertain the audience." GROO is accessible to everyone; MOONSHADOW is not — if it's Epic, take a glance at it.

It cuts down the retailer's work, tremendously, to know that there is only this one segment that is of deep concern. The only other product I can think of that we ask the retailer to always look at, is the graphic novels. At the same time, just by format and price — higher quality printing and higher price — we have indicated that this line is for the older reader, the reader with more disposable income. On the other hand, with Marvel and Star Comics, we have the same parameters that people like **Chris Claremont, Frank Miller,** and many other talented people have worked under for years — it's called the Comics Code Authority. The Code stamp appears on the entire Marvel line and the entire Star line.

PAT: *Is there anything you can do, Pam, to tell the wider audience about this?*

PAM: It's very difficult, because there's no question that there are many parents who still operate under the misapprehension that that package that is a comic book indicates juvenile material. It's a very difficult stereotype to break down.

Once again I have to go back to the idea that book publishers do children's books, and **Arthur Miller** books. Television does children's shows and MASTERPIECE THEATRE. Everybody allows for that range of material in other media, but comic books continue to battle this idea that they are just for kids and, consequently, these new adult books are looked at by some people with some apprehension.

One of the things that I have to say, when that argument comes up — one of the things I find unfair — is that comic books are more than entitled to expand as a medium. We're not asking parents to abdicate their responsibility in supervising what their younger children read. We do all the things Steve noted with the best of intentions, and we certainly do nothing to obfuscate the distinctions between the lines. We want those distinctions known and recognized, and we do everything possible to make them so. I'm not denying that there are still situations that fall between the cracks, but I think parents should always be watching what their kids read — whether it's comic books or regular books; I think they should be watching what movies they go to, what television they watch . . .

If the situation calls for a little bit more supervision than it did 25 years ago, so be it. That's the world we live in.

STEVE: I think the area I work with, the direct market, allows me a little more freedom. It's less of a challenge than the newsstand mass market, simply because the retailer in the direct market is tied much more closely to the comic book line as his primary line. As a result, that retailer is far more concerned, and far more likely to take the extra time to be concerned with what he's carrying. Therefore, the concerned retailer will be less likely to accidentally pass something along to a younger member of the audience when it should not have been. On the independent distributor level, the newsstand market, they are much more concerned with an entire line of periodicals, everything from JACK AND JILL to PLAYBOY. It's very difficult to pay that much attention to comic books.

Marvel
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Super heroes don't get married every day and when they do, as with all celebrities, it's news.
And THE AMAZING SPIDER MAN is getting married twice: already in this comic book and again in the comic-like Sunday June 6 newspaper strip. Naturally, Marvel's publicity efforts to pique media interest mirror these. Much of what we have in the works is meant to be announced at press time but will be revealed in later press releases and on the Marvel Telephone Message, (212) 576-9364.
COVERAGE IN YOUR AREA.
You, the direct market retailer, can get the media in your community (and Marvel will help).
Step 1 If you feel the media in your area will be interested in the story, contact Steve Sohler or Pam Rust at Marvel (212) 576-8662 to see if a press release is to begin with.
Step 2 Most of the folks who run today's media grew up with the Web Slinger and will be interested in "re: promoting" his page. Take the press release, copy it and save copies.
• NEWSPAPERS: Send a copy to the entertainment editor. Name, editor (given name).
• TELEVISION: Program director, children's programming producer.
• RADIO: Program director, promotion manager. Remember, there's nothing like a radio broadcast to get the word out fast. The minute it may will be issued, and we'll make the phone to make your pitch.
Step 3 Note the people who indicated interest in the story and call Steve or Pam again. We'll provide media backers that will include:
• Press releases
• Character profiles
• Where Spidey is getting married (in his own words)
• Wedding artwork
• Background on Mary Jane's gown and its famous designer
• Bridal registry
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The packet will be available about April 15
NATIONWIDE COVERAGE
While we discuss other wedding press coverage in your area, Marvel will be creating nationwide interest beginning with a major mailing the end of April. The mailing will include:
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• Radio networks
• Major newspapers
• Syndicated columnists
• Wire services
For best results, time your efforts to begin about the time
A follow-up mailing will be scheduled for the end of May to coincide with the May 31 appearance of SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL #21. This should result in coverage as the comic book becomes available.
If you have any questions or ideas that will enhance our efforts, please feel free to give us a call. Our best results will come from working together.
If you are interested in bringing Spidey to your shop this summer, just contact Barbara Mazer, Special Events Sales Manager here at Marvel. She'll help you all the way.
All Spider-Man characters are trademarks of Marvel Comics Group.

"Going out of business is not immoral."

STEVE SCHANES

Last winter I had the pleasure of interviewing Steve Schanes. We spoke in detail of the Pacific Comics/distribution "Bankruptcy," which you will learn was not really a bankruptcy at all.

Schanes was very open and honest. He spoke with me about things that he had never before revealed. Opening old wounds is never pleasant, and I greatly respect him for allowing me, a lawyer, to examine his history in the comics industry, both the good and the bad, in great detail.

I was taught in school we can learn from history. If that is so, publishers, distributors, and creators have a lot to learn from the Pacific tragedy.

The interview took place at the Blackthorne office, located in the basement of a ranchstyle house on Blackthorne Avenue, in the city of El Cajon, California...

ROD UNDERHILL: *I have had the opportunity to read various articles that have been printed regarding the failure of Pacific Comics. It is obvious to me that many of the writers that were dealing with that subject were lay people struggling with legal issues that were confusing, and that you suffered because of that.*

STEVE SCHANES: I'm sure of that. Going out of business is not immoral, first off, and everybody that has written about it wrote about it as an immoral thing. We lasted fourteen years, which was amazing, and it was a good run.

ROD: *And of course, you broke no laws...*

STEVE: We broke no laws, and I took no advantage of the situation, and personally got wiped out by the situation. Financially it was devastating, and we handled it as well as we could have without having had gone through it before. If I ever have to go through it again, I'll handle it better. But now that I've had that experience, I hope that I'll never have to go through that again.

ROD: *Jumping back to the beginning, you started in Pacific Beach (a suburb in San Diego), was it a comic book store?*

STEVE: I started it out of my parent's house at Pacific Beach, I was seventeen, and my brother was thirteen. We started Pacific Comics when we were that age. That was back in '71. I was in high school. Bill was in high school also. I started with $50, and bought a collection at the Spring Valley Swap Meet. That's how it started, we parlayed it up from there.

ROD: *You began selling old comic books?*

STEVE: We bought the collection, we started buying and selling old comic books, we put a small ad in Marvel Com-

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"Pacific didn't have good control. . . ."

LET MY RAISINS GO!

FREE THE RAISINS!

About the picture of Steve: we made this poster to commemorate the single most stressful day we've ever had here at Blackthorne. There was a problem with the US Border officers letting copies of our book, THE CALIFORNIA RAISINS IN 3-D, into the US. See, they're printed in Mexico and shipped up here to distribute. Now, it seems there has been a lot of black market Raisin material coming up from Mexico and CALRAB, the license owner, asked the Border Patrol to confiscate any unauthorized Raisin material. Unfortunately, they neglected to tell *us* that we needed special authorization. So when the books got to the border, the agents stopped the drivers, who called us in a panic. We in turn called CALRAB and eventually got the whole thing straightened out, but not without much wailing, and gnashing of raisins. — John Stephenson, editor

All art copyright © 1988 Blackthorne unless otherwise noted

"Pacific Comics went through a

ics, and in '73 we opened a small retail store in Pacific Beach, on Cass Street. Basically to give my Mother some space in her house which had been lost to the comic books, which by that time had monopolized most of the house. For the sake of getting them out of the house, we started the store, and we started the store on a $400 budget.

ROD: *Was that just you and Bill at the time?*

STEVE: Myself, my brother Bill, and my Mother also worked at the store.

ROD: *You eventually stopped the retail business didn't you?*

STEVE: Right, we got into the retail business by '73. By '76 we had five retail stores, and we decided that that was not the direction that we want to go. What had happened was that we had experienced a lot of robberies, and we got very demoralized, so we liquidated the stores, and got solely into wholesale. So, we contracted. Pacific Comics went through a series of contractions and expansions. That was our first major contraction. We then became a distributor, because we thought that we'd have more control, less labor, and we could more easily manage it. With one of the stores, if an employee didn't show up, my brother or myself would have to go to that physical store and work it.

We began running the wholesale out of the small Pacific Beach store. We picked up a lot of accounts, the weak link at that time in retailing was getting product to the stores, there was no direct distribution. The local distributors were not tuned to the speciality market, they were more tuned to the mass market like 7-Elevens, and that sort of thing. So we opened a warehouse in San Diego, then one in Los Angeles, and one in Illinois. When we started getting very big, and we were taking a good chunk of the print runs of Marvel and DC comics, we thought we'd try to produce a comic ourselves. That's how we began there.

ROD: *The would be CAPTAIN VICTORY?*

STEVE: Yes. That was in 1982.

ROD: *How did you meet Jack Kirby?*

STEVE: We had known Jack for years, we used to know him from conventions, and we used to send him, no charge, a lot of books that he didn't have access to. Like the reprints of his Marvel stuff, from Europe, and other things that he didn't have access to, that nobody was sending him copies of. So we sent him packages of those things. We also saw him at conventions. We were very happy about him, and when we were interested in publishing, we let word out that we were interested in publishing Jack. He contacted us about CAPTAIN VICTORY.

ROD: *Was Pacific the first company that established creator owned rights to the characters?*

STEVE: Pacific Comics basically changed the whole market of a number of fronts, we were the first company to offer the creators ownership of the characters that they created. We were the first company to offer royalties. We were the first company to split profit on licensing. We were the first company to do Baxter comics, the first to do Mando printing, we had other firsts as well. Those things were very expensive to do, but were also on the cutting edge. So it was an exciting time. But yes, we created the basic contract that is the standard contract for most creator owned comics today.

ROD: *And this has allowed companies like First, Eclipse and Comico to become so strong, because they have adopted these things?*

STEVE: Well, we certainly allowed them to follow a beaten path. They have all continued to expand their market, and they have done a wonderful job. The main thing that it has done, is it took the creators from approximately a hundred fifty dollars a page, maximum, to maybe upwards of five or six hundred dollars a page. In some cases more, where the book is selling huge quantities, it put some writers on a royalty, and is, in fact, indirectly responsible for Marvel's Epic line, because that was a response to Pacific Comics.

ROD: *That was in an effort to compete with Pacific?*

STEVE: Well, to maintain, Marvel had to react. Pacific was pulling away talent from the major companies, as an upstart company, because it could offer advantages that Marvel and DC couldn't. Pacific couldn't offer the marketing advantages, but it could offer ownership and royalties. Which was, in the long term, worth more than marketing. In order to compete with that, Marvel either had to match it on all its existing books, or had to create a new label. I believe that they opted for a new division because if they had matched it on all of their existing books it would have cost them millions. So I believe that is why Epic came out.

ROD: *Pacific had discovered a lot of real talent. Wasn't Dave Stevens first with Pacific?*

STEVE: **Dave Stevens** used to live in San Diego. He went to high school here along with a lot of other creative people, **John Pound**, Scott **Shaw**, there is a whole bunch of them that stayed together, and we used to hire **Scott Shaw** and **John Pound** to do illustrations for our catalogues in the late Seventies, and the early Eighties, and we always knew Dave, and when we started the color line, we knew Dave was interested in doing comics and we contacted him, and we were willing to work with his need to put out a superior graphic project, while being flexible on his scheduling.

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FAIL, AND I WILL DESTROY YOU
I DO NOT KNOW "FAIL."

series of contractions and expansions."

ROD: *Would it be fair to say that towards the latter years, the artist end had done real well, but the money end was experiencing problems?*

STEVE: It was no reflection on Bill, he is really bright. What it is a reflection on was the economics of being a distributor and a publisher. Pacific Comics publishing was profitable from the first book, it was an amazing smash hit, the timing was right, the creators were ready, the fans were looking for other options, and the comic books went out and did great. Being a publisher caused damage to the distribution end of the business, because the people that were distributing we were also in competition with us as a publisher. What would have been smarter, would have been to sell off the distribution, and just be a publisher. We had always, up to that point, been changing. We had been in retailing for four or five years, got out of retailing and into distribution. We should have just got into publishing. It is much more accountable and you can more readily see where the dollars are going. Distribution is a very marginal business, maybe working on five to eight percent gross margin. Extremely tough, you have to be very cautious, calculating, you have to really have good controls, and that is a problem that all distributors have. Pacific didn't have good controls to make distribution work. There was a problem with buying too much — Pacific over bought with the assumption that it could sell the inventory, the critical overbuy was during a

CAPTAIN VICTORY by Jack Kirby, Pacific's first color comic.

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"Pacific owed DC over $100,000."

period called "Black September," it was when Marvel decided to release a tremendous amount of product, and the market place was impacted in a manner that caused the retailers to possibly order less quote/unquote "independent" product.

ROD: *There was an inundation of Marvel titles at that time?*

STEVE: At that time. The retailers and distributors underestimated the impact of that load. What happened was all the other stuff that we had bought, that we would have ordinarily sold over a regular period of time, three months to nine months, didn't turn. We built up massive quantities of inventory. We ended up with way too much inventory and it caused a real bottle neck on the cash flow. Pacific Comics at the end had, on paper, not a bad mix, or ratio, of receivables to payables. Our receivables were around $500,000, our payables were probably around $750,000, we had $500,000 of inventory paid for, on paper, it would have washed. The receivables were coming in too slow, the aging couldn't bank the receivables because the receivables were over the aging limit, and the payables were due and the inventory was not selling. We did not see ourselves turning around no matter how many physical hours we were putting in, 80 or 100 hours a week, it wasn't going to turn around, so we decided to liquidate it.

ROD: *Initially, you shut down the publishing aspect of Pacific, and tried to concentrate on saving the distributing aspect.*

STEVE: They were both under the same corporate umbrella: Blue Dolphin Enterprises. There was no way to salvage one without the other. So, therefore, we concentrated, at the end, to make profitable the unprofitable end, which was distribution. But it was beyond the point of turning back

ROD: *How was your father (Dr. Steve Schanes) involved with Pacific?*

STEVE: My father worked for Pacific for approximately two years, in a position of controller, basically. He was there for the last two years. My brother Pablo worked in the accounting department with the computers. We had about 800 accounts, and the book keeping was just astronomical.

ROD: *In about 1983 Pacific took out several large loans. (These were $150,000, $250,000 and $31,000 in amounts.)*

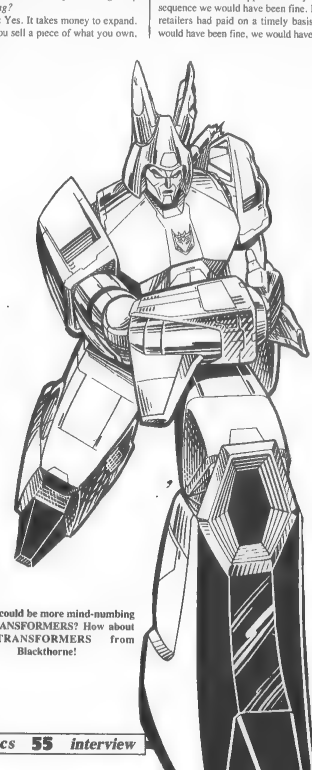
STEVE: Those loans were borrowed at over 20%, hundreds of thousands of dollars. That's tough for any business to pay off. Extremely tough in a distribution business. Those loans had to be borrowed to continue to grow during that period of time, but the interest was really to the detriment of Pacific Comics. It was like dealing with loan sharks.

ROD: *The money was borrowed about the same time that Pacific was greatly expanding?*

STEVE: Yes. It takes money to expand. Either you sell a piece of what you own, or you borrow. We opted to borrow.

ROD: *The loans had outrageous interest upon them, you had warehouses with merchandise that you couldn't move fast enough, and you were receiving slow payments*

STEVE: If it had happened in any other sequence we would have been fine. If the retailers had paid on a timely basis, we would have been fine, we would have paid



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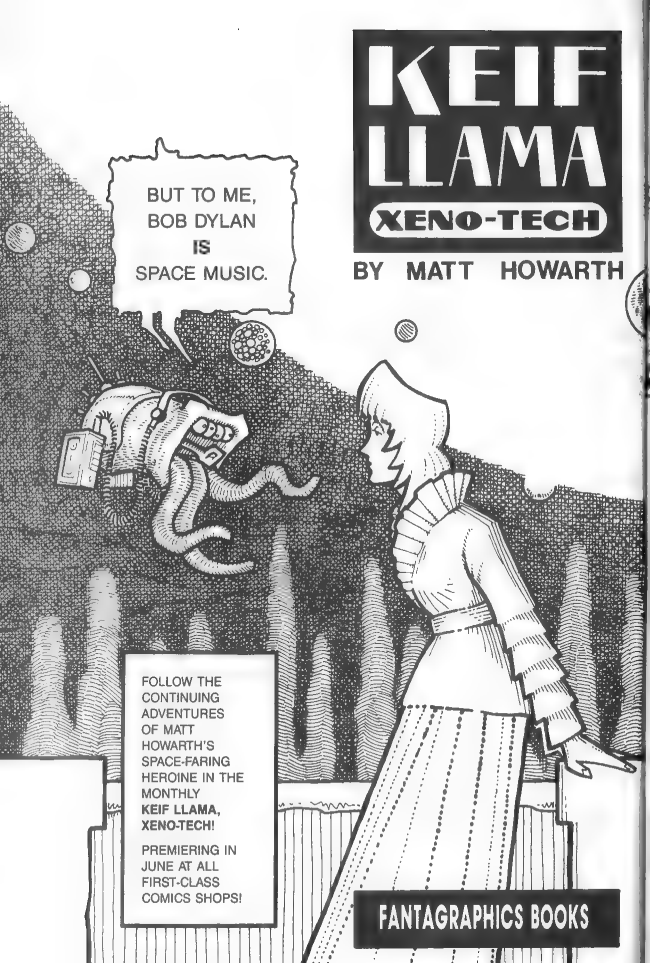
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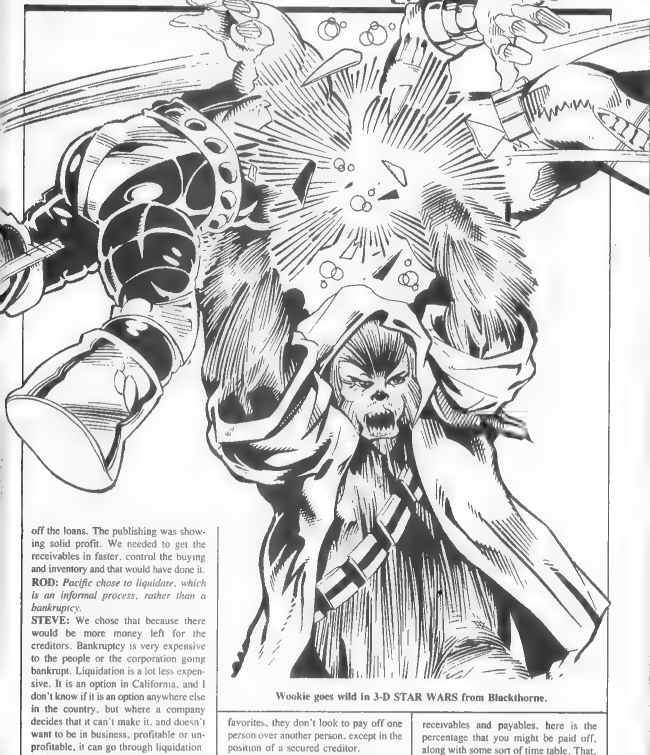


Wookie goes wild in 3-D STAR WARS from Blackthorne.

off the loans. The publishing was showing solid profit. We needed to get the receivables in faster, control the buying and inventory and that would have done it.

ROD: *Pacific chose to liquidate, which is an informal process, rather than a bankruptcy.*

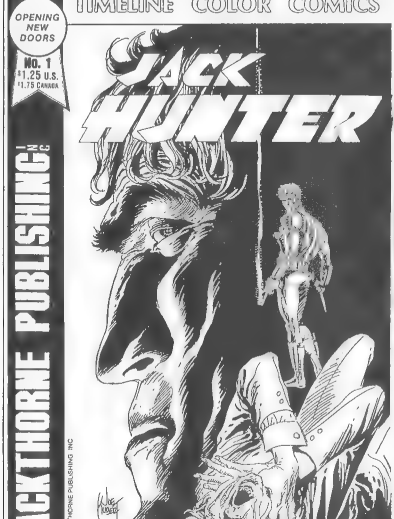
STEVE: We chose that because there would be more money left for the creditors. Bankruptcy is very expensive to the people or the corporation going bankrupt. Liquidation is a lot less expensive. It is an option in California, and I don't know if it is an option anywhere else in the country, but where a company decides that it can't make it, and doesn't want to be in business, profitable or unprofitable, it can go through liquidation. Basically Pacific Comics, Blue Dolphin Enterprises, signed over the corporation to a non-profit corporation, San Diego Wholesale Credit Association, whose job it is to liquidate companies and pay off creditors. Their position is they don't play favorites, they don't look to pay off one person over another person, except in the position of a secured creditor.

ROD: *I imagine that they follow the same guidelines that the Bankruptcy Court follows.*

STEVE: They send out notices to all the creditors, notifying them that the company is in liquidation, here is the amount of receivables and payables, here is the percentage that you might be paid off, along with some sort of time table. That, as in bankruptcy, relieves you. You are out of business, and that relieves the stress of the moment. The stress of the moment was very tough for us. It was an enormous amount of stress.

ROD: *Creditors are hounding you, and*

"Blackthorne started on borrowed



you can't do your job.

STEVE: It is a very uncomfortable situation to be in

ROD: *About $90,000 was received?*

STEVE: Through a liquidation of inventory. A little over $100,000. I'm not sure what the computers went for. There was a forklift, and a whole lot of physical items that I wasn't privy to how much they were liquidated for.

ROD: *Looking at some of the actual debts. I see that Pacific owed DC over $100,000.*

STEVE: We did between 45 days and 60 days billing with DC as distributor, depending on the cover price of the product. It was two dollars or above, we had sixty days. If it was under that, we got thirty days. That was the normal billing period for Pacific, that was not unusual

ROD: *That was just how much product that you were dealing with at the time?*

STEVE: That's correct

ROD: *I didn't nonice that Marvel had submitted a request for payment. Had they been paid?*

STEVE: No, they were owed money also, but I'm also not sure of the total, probably twice the amount of DC. Probably in the $200,000 range.

ROD: *Archie Comics was owed a relatively small amount, about $10,000?*

STEVE: All of the comic venders were within the normal 35 to 60 day terms.

ROD: *Then, of course, there were various printers, including the famous one in Arizona, Associated Lithographers. Did that lack of payment have a pretty negative impact on them, with you not paying your bill?*

STEVE: They had just gone through a change of ownership about four months before Pacific went through liquidation, they were already in trouble, and had been bought out by an entrepreneur who buys and sells corporations that are in trouble, and tries to build them up and sell them at a profit. They were having trouble, anyway, at the time. We weren't a huge percent of the billing anyway, and they were a very huge company.

ROD: *Bud Plant, I noticed, had a claim for about $22,000. They are a distributor.*

STEVE: Bud Plant sold product to Pacific Comics Distributor and probably was owed that amount in normal billings. We were buying a lot of stuff from Bud Plant

ROD: *I noticed various small printing bills, especially in San Diego. Were you doing one comic at a time toward the end?*

STEVE: No. Those were probably for the printing of catalogues or the printing of portfolio plates, stationery, and so on. We were a fairly large company with constant printing needs.

ROD: *I was very surprised to learn that nearly all of the creators for Pacific ended up getting paid for their labours. You went out of your way to make sure that that happened, didn't you?*

STEVE: Yes. The artists were a top priority at the end. We felt that the financial impact on them would be the greatest, so we went out of our way to minimize the impact. Some were impacted, but the majority were not hurt financially. They may have been hurt by not getting work, or by gaps in the scheduling of their work

ROD: *It has been remarked by people, perhaps ignorantly, that you were looting the company towards the end.*

STEVE: The fact was that every available dollar that went in went out to payables, and that there was no available dollars to loot, nor would we have wanted to if there had been.

ROD: *Blackthorne is doing very well, isn't it?*

STEVE: Yes. Blackthorne is doing real well. Blackthorne Publishing started immediately after Pacific Comics went under. Blackthorne publishing started because I needed an income. It started on borrowed money from my credit cards, it started from a very small capital base, operating from out of my house. It started with people and companies that were will-

money from my credit card."

ing to work with me, knowing what I am about, both my positives and my negatives. I started with people and companies that Pacific Comics owed money to. Because those people and companies perceived that Steve Schanes had a value. That's how it started.

ROD: *People have a lot of faith in you, regardless of Pacific's history.*

STEVE: In producing a product.

ROD: *I am told that you have quite a talent in locating and discovering creators, in picking a good artist.*

STEVE: My strengths are visual. I can pick out commercial, visual stories and drawings, paintings and that sort of thing. I am very good at that. I am also good at picking trends. My weak part, I would say, is that I am not good at reading and editing scripts. So I hire people who are as strong in that field as I am in picking art. I also have a very good strength in being a promoter. In getting out there and pushing whatever I decide to publish.

ROD: *You are trying to strongly enter into the non-direct sales market?*

STEVE: We feel that the comic market is a very solid market, but has limitations on the amount of dollars that are available. As we have just gone through a peaking out of the market during the last couple of months, we now know that there is a maximum amount of dollars available. If you go over that, you just end up producing more titles, but the total runs stay the same. By diversifying out of the comics market, I can produce more titles with larger runs. I can also spread my risk to a greater number of distributors.

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LAST WORD

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MERKLE: NO ACTUAL FACTS

Dear Mark.

Lou Ann Merkle's statement that "More Vietnam vets have committed suicide than were killed in the Vietnam War," is a gross exaggeration and based on no actual facts! I am surprized you would banner-line such a cruel sham across the top of your quality magazine.

Ms. Merkle discredits all Vietnam Veterans living and dead and offers false information to those who know no better. Placing politics aside, facts should be offered — not opinions told as facts.

Eric K. Pederson
333 E. 30th St.
Box 5
NYC, NY 10016

I'm PEREZed!

Dear Mr. Mangels:

I was very excited about the news of an all **Perez** issue of COMICS INTERVIEW. Your interview with Mister **Perez** was fabulous! I read it all day Saturday and Sunday. I could not put it down. Thank you for asking all of the questions we've been waiting for someone to ask.

Sandy Parker
205 Chartres St.
Bay St. Louis, MS 39520

COMICS INTERVIEW: A NEW CULT

David:

I get COMICS INTERVIEW each month religiously — been meaning to write you to congratulate you on some excellent issues. You've been delving into some great topics lately, and the special issue interviews with people like **Frank Frazetta** have been especially great reading. I also like the idea of returning to previous interview subjects (like **John Byrne**) for updates on their activities. In any case, as you can see, I really am reading and enjoying CI.

Jeff Gelb
1930 Century Park West
Los Angeles, CA 90067

POPEYE NEEDS HELP

Dear DAK:

I'm hoping you might be able to help me with some information I need for a Jaycee project.

I'm the president of the Chester-Area Jaycees and an avid comics fan. Since Chester was the boyhood home and inspiration for **Elsie Segar**, I was hoping I might find a comics or comic strip artist or three or five who might like to honor **Segar** with a little art work of their characters or Popeye or both.

Ideally, we would like to display the work at Chester's Annual Popeye's Picnic initially and then donate it to the Randolph County Museum for use when the museum gets around to honoring the role comics have played in the county. (Sparta is Randolph County's biggest town.)

The help I ask of you (if I may be so bold) is this: Do you think there are enough professionals out there who would want to take part in such a project? If so, how does one go about finding them?

I thank you in advance for your help.

Before I go, let me rave a little about your magazine. I've been reading it since day one. I'd like to say I've read every issue cover-to-cover, but when I count them, it only adds up to 35. The last one was the **George Perez** novel. It was two hours most enjoyably spent.

Craig M. Buchman
Chester Jaycees
Post Office Box 132
Chester, Illinois 62233

How does one go about finding professionals? Well, one sure way is through the pages of COMICS INTERVIEW — and I hope all artists with an interest in Segar's work (are you listening, Terry?) will contact you, Craig. And thanks for the kind comments — do us a favor: spread the word!

— DAK

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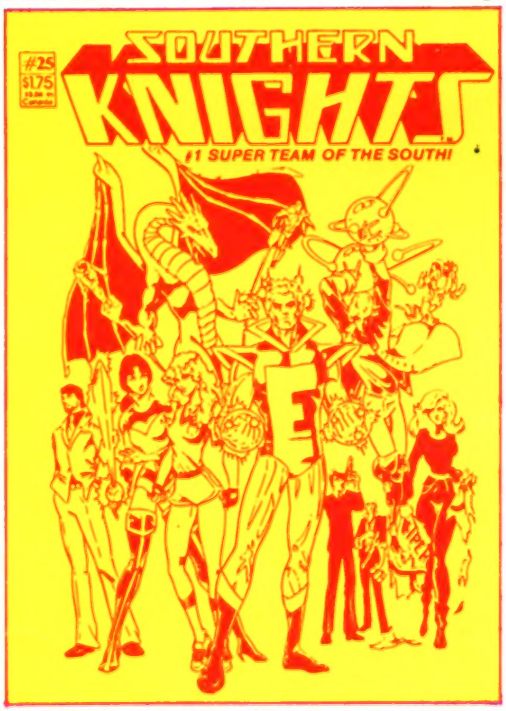

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